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P. M. W.

THE LADY OF CHATEAU BLANG



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The Lady of Chateau Blanc

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE

BY

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Author of "Matawanda," "The Portrait," "The Romance of La Tour,"
"Beaubassin," etc.

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THE AUTHOR.

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THE LADY OF CHATEAU BLANC.

CHAPTER I.

FORTUNE'S SMILE.



It was a glorious morning in the fall of the year 1814. Napoleon Bonaparte was at Elba; Louis XVIII. was in Paris; all France was dissembling to the Bourbons, and the Allies at the Congress of Vienna were quarrelling

with one another over the map of Europe. The eagles that had figured so conspicuously at Austerlitz, Wagram, Friedland, Borodino, had suddenly disappeared, and despite the protestations of the soldiers, the fleur-de-lis of the restored King floated proudly and defiantly in the breeze from the dome of the Tuileries. It had become dangerous to wear the tri-colors of the Empire; patriotic to wear the white of the Bourbons; and while *Vive l'Empereur* was uttered with fear and trembling, *Vive le Roi* was shouted with an exultation that threatened to rend the sky. It was strange to many that they had not realized before how much they loved the King; it was extraordinary that they had not perceived sooner the rapidity with which *le petit corporal* was leading France to ruin. It was surprising how easily they could reconcile themselves to the return of the *émigrés*, who for years had been fighting against France like brother against brother, and it was equally surprising how easily they could

submit to the exile of the man who, out of the chaos of the Revolution, had made France. Yet there were men in Paris who fully understood the situation, and although they were prudent enough to keep their convictions beneath the surface, they could not help feeling contempt for many who, having profitted under the Emperor, were now lauding the King.

At the Lion d'Or inn, in the Faubourg St. Antoine, on the morning already cited, three army officers sat chatting together over the present state of affairs. Gaspard Lenont, the proprietor of the inn, a bustling little man in shirt sleeves and apron, with a face as round and as rubicund as a harvest moon, was looking after the comforts of his guests with an attention which was almost obsequious. It was Monsieur le Colonel de Banyan this, and Monsieur le Major de Brissac that, and Monsieur le Captain Martello something else, with a politeness which led a man, who stood guzzling gin at the bar, to believe that the Lion d'Or inn was at that moment honored with distinguished guests. But when he discovered that these men were only half-pay officers, he shrugged his shoulders and resumed his drinking with a cynical expression of countenance that was decidedly uncomplimentary. Finally, however, this knowing customer, having imbibed a sufficient quantity of gin to render his equi-

librium somewhat dubious, left the inn, and there being no more customers to serve at that moment, the attentive proprietor drew off to await the possible requirements of his military patrons, with a hope that he might overhear their conversation.

"So the Duc de Barri is to review the troops to-day," said Major de Brissac, removing his pipe and blowing a cloud of smoke into the air with a toss of the head that might have meant contempt.

This man was short and rather thick-set, with a round, ruddy face, curly black hair and side whiskers, black eyes and short, thick nose. His uniform was that of the Artillery.

"These Bourbons apparently take great pleasure in showing themselves off to the soldiers," said Captain Martello, with a laugh.

The Captain was quite a young man, having a bronzed though merry face, blue eyes, fair hair and a Grecian nose. He was tall of stature and had the physique of an athlete. His uniform was that of the —th Hussars.

"The old idea of royalty has not gone out of them," said the Major. "Their doings are not what the people were led to expect."

"They are taking the wrong course," said Colonel de Banyan. "There is no policy in declaring the people of the Empire rebels, nor is it decent of them to starve and abuse the men who have helped to make France. The country was never prosperous under these hated Bourbons, and she has been glorious under the Emperor."

"They treat us like Cossacks!" exclaimed de Brissac, with a fierce scowl.

"They are making enemies," cried the Colonel, with spirit. "They will hear from the people soon."

Colonel de Banyan, in the brilliant uniform of the Guard Chasseurs, was a fine

specimen of a soldier of the Empire. His figure was tall, broad-shouldered, finely proportioned, and as straight as an arrow. His face was bronzed by the suns of many lands; across his left cheek was a long red scar, the result of a Russian sabre cut at Borodino. His eyes were large and of a deep brown or hazel. His hair was black and wavy. His Roman features denoted great force, endurance and determination, and while there were evidences of fierceness and severity, there were also indications of gentleness and good fellowship.

A few moments of silence ensued, during which de Banyan smoked vigorously. Martello was the first to speak.

"It is starvation to remain here in Paris," said he.

"If we ever expect to join the Emperor at Elba, we should lose no time about it," said de Brissac.

"Suppose we start the day after to-morrow?" said de Banyan.

"Why not to-morrow?" cried Martello.

"Why not to-day?" exclaimed de Brissac. "I am getting sick of being treated like a dog."

"Well, let us consider the matter," said de Banyan.

In the discussion which followed, de Banyan's suggestion to start in two days was agreed upon; then they rose from their seats, drank a toast to the Emperor, paid their reckoning, and were about to leave the inn, when the door opened and gave admittance to a rather genteel-looking stranger. He was dressed in the extreme of fashion and seemed to have popped out of a band-box. He viewed his surroundings for a moment with an air of disgust, as if the odor of liquor and the plainness of the room affected him greatly. Finally, perceiving de Banyan and his friends, he approached them with an air of diffidence.

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"I beg pardon, gentlemen, for this
seeming intrusion," said he. "But I
think I have business with one of you
which may prove of considerable impor-
tance. I was informed that I should
probably find Colonel de Banyan here—
Colonel Maurice de Banyan, of the Guard
Chasseurs. Which of you gentlemen is
he?"

"I am Colonel de Banyan, monsieur,
at your service," said that worthy, step-
ping forward.

The expression of the stranger's face
changed, as if he had been suddenly re-
lieved of a great burden.

"Well, monsieur," said he, somewhat
jocosely, "It is the devil's own chase I
have had for you. To find a man in
Paris, without knowing anything of his
haunts, is like hunting a pearl in the
sand. My name is Argeneau, and it
grieves me to say that I am the bearer of
sad news."

"Ah, indeed," exclaimed de Banyan,
seriously.

"Yes, monsieur. The fact is, your
uncle, M. le General Baron de Banyan,
whom I have had the honour of serving as
private secretary, was stricken with apo-
plexy three days ago."

"*Mon Dieu!* then—"

"Monsieur, the stroke was fatal."

"Ah, *parbleu!* that is sad news in-
deed."

As de Banyan exhibited deep feeling,
the stranger waited a few moments, dur-
ing which time he helped himself to a
pinch of snuff from a beautifully wrought
snuff box, then continued:

"Being his private secretary, monsieur,
I took the liberty to enquire into his af-
fairs to some extent, and finding that you
were the nearest of kin, and therefore
heir to his estates, I made it my business
to hunt you up and inform you of what
has happened."

"You did right, Monsieur Argeneau,

and perhaps I shall have the opportunity
of showing my appreciation and grati-
tude."

Here de Banyan turned to his friends.

"You see, my dear friends," said he,
"it will be necessary for me to leave
Paris to-night."

"We heartily congratulate you, Maur-
ice," said de Brissac, somewhat jubilantly.

"Congratulate me!" exclaimed de
Banyan, with an expression which had in
it evidences of surprise and disapproval.

The Major was quick to perceive that
he had said the wrong thing. Yet it was
only an instance of one man judging an-
other by himself. As he was somewhat
diplomatic, however, he felt it necessary
to justify his remark.

"Well," said he, in a voice that hinted
of chagrin. "The death of an uncle is,
I presume, sad. But when that uncle is
rich, and leaves his gilded slippers for his
nephew to step into, that nephew, I take
it, is in a fair position to be congratu-
lated."

"Still we should not fail in our respect
to the dead, my dear Lucien," returned
de Banyan, somewhat coldly. "The
baron was my father's brother, and des-
pite the fact that a quarrel early in my
boyhood kept me from him, let me assure
you, though I inherit his riches, his death
is a severe blow to me."

"Then pray pardon me, my dear Maur-
ice, for my impertinence?"

"Certainly, my dear friend. I shall
see you and Louis again, after I have set-
tled my uncle's affairs. As soon as you
can, join me at Chateau Blanc near
Rouillé, in the department of Seine-et-
Marne, then we shall make further arrange-
ments. Meanwhile, adieu. As I shall ride
to my uncle's estate to night, I must at
once secure a passage in the afternoon
diligence."

Here the stranger spoke up.

"Thinking that you might wish to re-

turn with me, Monsieur le Colonel, I took the liberty of bringing the baron's carriage. It is at the Three Dolphins, at your disposal."

"You are a prudent man, monsieur," said de Banyan, with a look of approval. "It may be that I shall need you in my service. I shall not forget you. And now my good friends, as my affairs will need some attention before I can leave the city, I shall bid you adieu."

He shook hands with the Major and the Captain, and, accompanied by Monsieur Argeneau, departed.

"Nevertheless, Captain," said the Major, as de Banyan disappeared, "I think the Colonel a lucky dog. Fortune seems to smile on him always at the most opportune moment."

"He is a lucky dog and no mistake. But if I were in his place, and were so suddenly bereft of an uncle, whose estates are worth several millions of francs, I

could find plenty of consolation in stepping into the old man's shoes, and I feel certain that I could manage to worry along without him. Eh! Major?"

"Right you are, my dear Captain. But de Banyan never knew how to appreciate the smiles of fortune. I take it he is sighing now like a love-lorn maiden over this bit of news, when he should be rejoicing over his good luck. Well, since he will not rejoice, it follows that we must, for it means a franc or two in our own pockets. Maurice never forgets his friends."

"Then here's to Colonel Baron de Banyan," exclaimed the Captain, filling two glasses from the decanter on the table. "May he live long to enjoy his wealth."

"I heartily endorse the sentiment" said de Brissac.

And they drained their glasses to the bottom.



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T was late in the afternoon. De Banyan sat in his carriage, silent and reflective. His companion, Monsieur Argeneau, had several times attempted to converse with him, but failing to draw forth anything more than monosyllables, had finally subsided, and to all appearances was endeavoring to sleep in the seat opposite.

De Banyan's countenance was sad. He sat with his arms folded, and his chin low down in his collar. Now and again he heaved a sigh, which told of the melancholy working of his mind, of which his companion each time took notice with a furtive glance of his drowsy eyes. The postilion cracked his whip frequently, and urged on his horses with all the enthusiasm of one who realizes that time and tide wait for no man, and that the emergency of the moment is of vast importance. Hence the carriage lumbered along the dusty road with many a lunge and many a swerve that was unpleasant to its occupants, but nevertheless did not elicit from them the wish to decrease the speed. It would seem that de Banyan was anxious to assume his new *role* of Baron. It would seem that he thought his uncle's riches might fly before he could get possession of them; yet his extreme

melancholy was there to contradict the inference. It was certain, however, that he placed considerable importance on reaching the chateau as soon as possible, and the sound of the postilion's whip and voice was music in his ears. They had travelled thus for some distance, when de Banyan saw fit to address his companion.

"By-the-by," said he, "I believe you intimated, when we first met, that I was the sole heir to the Baron's estate; are you sure of this?"

The prospect of a conversation animated the face of Monsieur Argeneau. He was one of those men who enjoy a conversation and are usually found troublesome just when one does not wish to talk.

"I believe the estate is strictly entailed, monsieur," said he. "You are, so far as I am able to discover, the only heir of the male line, and unless Mademoiselle Selma has some claim, I know of no other."

"Mademoiselle Selma!" exclaimed de Banyan, in surprise. "Who is she?"

"Oh, do you not know, monsieur? She is the Baron's adopted daughter."

"The devil!"

De Banyan settled back in his seat and looked at Argeneau in astonishment.

"I was not aware of this," said he.

"No one else knows of it either. She is generally supposed to be his daughter."

"But he was married?"

"Yes, in Egypt; but his wife died be-

fore he returned to France. He adopted the child in Egypt."

"Strange I never knew of this."

"Monsieur le Baron was very careful that it should not be known."

"It throws another light on the subject."

"The estate is strictly entailed, monsieur, and can only pass to you."

"But this girl must be provided for."

"There is enough for both, monsieur."

"Perhaps she is already provided for."

"That is not unlikely, monsieur."

"There is a will, of course?"

"Oh yes."

"Do you know its purport?"

"No."

"How did you know of me?"

"Monsieur le Baron had spoken of you quite often. Besides, there are directions on the back of the will."

"And you came at once?"

"Immediately after his death."

"Why did you not come before? You say he was stricken three days ago."

"We were greatly excited, monsieur. I did not think of you."

"But did not my uncle ask for me?"

"He was unconscious from the moment he was stricken."

"And Mademoiselle Selma?"

"She knew nothing of you whatever."

De Banyan was more anxious than ever to reach his destination. Several times he urged the postillion to increase the speed, but it was late in the night when they reached the chateau.

It was a beautiful place, and in the moonlight de Banyan perceived that the edifice and surroundings were not overpretentious, but were well in keeping with the unostentatious spirit of the late baron. There was also evidence of the building having, at some time or other, served as a fortress as well as a dwelling. There were heavy stone walls with battlements, two great stone towers, a stone

stairway leading to the entrance, and also indications of there once having been a drawbridge and a moat. Taken all together, it had rather a formidable appearance to those who were not of its household.

De Banyan was not long in gaining admittance, and, escorted by Argeneau, he immediately repaired to the library. At present he was more like the guest than the proprietor of the establishment, and was quite satisfied to let Argeneau do the honors. His arrival evidently was expected. Argeneau rang, and a servant entered.

"Monsieur le Baron de Banyan has arrived," said he. "Inform Madame Mortier that we will lunch here."

"And who is Madame Mortier?" said de Banyan, after the servant had disappeared.

"The housekeeper, monsieur. As good a soul as ever lived. She was mademoiselle's nurse."

"And does she know of this Egyptian affair?"

"Yes, but she is ignorant of mademoiselle's origin. All she knows is the fact that when General de Banyan was aide-de-camp to General Bonaparte at Cairo, he was possessed of the whim to adopt a female infant."

De Banyan could not suppress a smile.

"Rather a strange whim for a soldier, was it not?" said he lightly.

"There was a reason for it," answered Argeneau quickly.

"Oh, I don't doubt it in the least. But this Madame Mortier, is she trustworthy?"

"Quite, as women go."

"You mean—"

"She should never know more about this affair than she does at present."

"I understand."

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of two servants with the luncheon. As de Banyan and Argeneau

were both hungry, and the presence of the servants prevented them renewing the topic, very little was said while the luncheon was being disposed of. De Banyan was thoughtful, and made only a few commonplace remarks. Argeneau showed a tendency to lead the conversation, but it finally dawned upon him that de Banyan was not giving the attention he desired, and he therefore deemed it prudent to finish his lunch in silence. As de Banyan was raising a glass of rare old Burgundy to his lips, he paused suddenly, and, holding the glass aloft, sat looking at it contemplatively.

"Monsieur Argeneau," said he, still looking at his glass, "we will not disturb the papers to-night. Such haste would be disrespectful to the dead. I desire, therefore, to wait until after the funeral."

He drank his wine and set down the glass.

"As you please, monsieur," said Argeneau. "I am at your service."

"But," continued de Banyan, "I desire you to conduct me to the room containing my uncle's remains, before I retire for the night."

He rose from the table as he spoke. Argeneau rose also.

"Certainly, monsieur," said Argeneau. "It is an easy matter. The room is near at hand."

They passed along a wide corridor; then, turning to the left, entered the death chamber. The room was lighted only by the candles which burned at the bier of the dead baron. As they entered, a young woman, who had been kneeling at the side of the corpse, suddenly rose to her feet, turned a frightened face to the intruders, then hurriedly left the room by another door.

"It is mademoiselle," said Argeneau. "She was much attached to the Baron."

"I am sorry I have disturbed her,"

said de Banyan, drawing back. "Perhaps I had better retire."

"She will not return, monsieur," said Argeneau.

"In that case, then, leave me, but remain within call. For a few moments I wish to be alone."

As Argeneau left the room, de Banyan advanced a few paces and stood beside the casket.

It was a grand old face upon which he gazed; the face of a soldier, wrinkled and weather-beaten, though pallid now in death. The white hair, falling about it, made it venerable. The long, deep scar across it from brow to cheek, telling of a sabre cut, made it heroic. The finely-shaped mouth, hinting of mildness and generosity, made it lovable. The high, broad brow, suggesting benevolence and an elevated mind, made it honorable. The broad prominent chin, the large aquiline nose, the breadth of head between the ears, the heavy jaw, suggesting great executive ability, made it a formidable countenance, and filled one with awe and respect. The body was of splendid size and proportion, and was clothed in the uniform of a General of Division. It lay in a casket of mahogany, which rested upon a pall of black velvet, and was surrounded by candles, according to the Catholic faith. There was no other light in the room.

De Banyan stood for a time, with hands clasped before him and head bowed. He seemed to be studying the face as if to fix it in his memory. Occasionally he heaved a sigh, which told of the sadness within. Nearly eighteen years had passed since he had quarrelled with the man who now lay dead before him. He had not been beneath his uncle's roof since, nor had he so much as exchanged a word with him. Now he regretted it all, and he was deeply affected that he had not received his uncle's pardon before the hand of death

had snatched the opportunity from him for ever. Finally, however, he aroused himself and looked slowly about the room; then, with a half-lingering gaze at the corpse, he started for the doorway. On his way his attention was arrested by an object on the floor. He stooped and picked it up. It was a lady's handkerchief. He looked about the room, looked at the handkerchief, hesitated, then, putting the handkerchief in his pocket, opened the door.

"Argeneau," said he, in a low voice.

"Here, monsieur," was the answer.

"Conduct me to my apartments."

Argeneau complied in silence. At the door de Banyan paused.

"My uncle must have died suddenly," said he.

"He was stricken in the forenoon, and died on the third day," said Argeneau.

"He was alone at the time of the attack. Upon entering the library two hours after he had breakfasted, I found him unconscious. He was beyond the power of medical aid before the doctor arrived."

"Had he been ailing at all?"

"No, I believe not. I never heard him complain of anything, except an occasional heavy pain in the chest."

"It was indeed sudden."

"Very."

"When will the funeral take place?"

"To-morrow, at three o'clock."

"Very well. Good night, Argeneau."

"Good night, Monsieur le Baron, and may your sleep be sweet."

De Banyan stood in the half-opened doorway, watching Argeneau as he passed down the corridor.

"Monsieur le Baron," murmured de Banyan. "How strange it sounds. It is a title I had never hoped for, and yet, if it were not for the charter which Louis XVIII. has been compelled to grant the people of France, I doubt if I should be anything more than plain Monsieur, even

with my uncle's riches to lend me influence."

His right hand was resting upon the lintel of the door; he leaned his brow upon it, and for a moment contemplated the floor. Then, with a deep sigh, he stepped within the room, and all grew still throughout the corridor.

CHAPTER III.

SELMA.

Morning came, and with it a glorious sunshine, clear skies, and the songs of birds. Selma de Banyan sat at the window of her boudoir, gazing pensively out at the park, with her chin in her hand and her elbow on the window-sill. Now and then she bowed her head upon her arms and wept so that her whole form shook with her sobbing. Then, drying her eyes, she resumed her former occupation of gazing out at the park.

She was attired in a black gown, which fell about her in graceful folds, and gave to the eye an agreeable conception of a beautiful figure. A snowy neck, a shapely head, crowned with a wealth of golden tresses, a pink-and-white complexion that seemed like wax in contrast with her black gown, superb eyes, a fine nose, a beautiful mouth, together with a bright intelligent brow, were enough in themselves to win the admiration of the most critical. But, to the close observer, there was more to be admired than beautiful features. There was the expression of soul within, combined with womanly dignity, sympathy, strength of character, and—crowning all—a sweet unconsciousness of self. She was probably not over seventeen, and, despite a suggestion of inexperience with the world, there was every evidence of quick-wittedness and independence.

The room in which she sat was a most inviting apartment, with panelled walls,

and ceiling tinted with pink; purple and gold, and was furnished in the height of fashion. The number of rugs, *portieres*, divans and easy chairs to be seen suggested every comfort. A harp stood in one corner of the room, in company with a lute and a cabinet of music. There was also a well-filled bookcase, and a dainty little *escritore*. On the walls were beautiful pictures, and on an easel in another corner was a full-sized painting of the late Baron de Banyan. A marble mantel, with a Venetian mirror reaching to the ceiling, and embellished with a deep frame of gold, supported a number of knick-knacks of a lady's choosing and a pretty clock of Italian marble. From a rosette in the ceiling depended a candelabra of twenty-five candles. At the farther end of the room a door opened into a sleeping apartment. To the left of this, in the adjoining wall, was the door which opened into the corridor.

It was evident that Selma had been reared in luxury, and if she knew not how to meet the trials and tribulations of life it was through no fault of hers. The death of Baron de Banyan, whom she had looked upon as her father, was her first great grief. She had never known her mother, but had loved the Baron with all her heart. He had ever been kind and indulgent, and, now that he was no more, she was quite irreconcilable. Madame Mortier had sought to console her, but to no purpose. She frequently entered the room unannounced, looked solicitously at the sorrowing maiden, spoke a few comforting words, and disappeared; only to enter again in a few moments with a look of sympathy, and then disappear without saying anything. Presently, however, she entered with a smile on her face. She was a short, thick-set woman, with a full round face, and with hair and eyes as black as jet. She held in her hand a delicate lace handkerchief.

"Why, nurse," said Selma, "what have you there?"

"Your handkerchief, my love. Monsieur the new baron gave it me, with his compliments to you. He picked it up last night in the room where monsieur your papa lies."

"The new baron, dear nurse! Has he come so soon!"

"Yes, my pretty one."

"Then it was he who entered the room last night with M. Argeneau."

"He arrived last night, deary, and he seems a very pleasant young man to meet. He wished me to convey his deepest sympathy to you, and say that he is at your service and awaits your command."

"He is very kind, but I shall not command him, nurse; at least, not at present. My heart is too full of grief. But tell me, what is he like? Is he handsome? You say he is young?"

"He is both young and handsome, and, judging from the scar upon his face, he is brave."

"Indeed! Is the scar like that of papa's?"

"Yes, only crossing the face at a different angle."

"Then he is a soldier?"

"He is a colonel of chasseurs."

"Only a colonel! Papa was a general."

"True; but Monsieur le Colonel is young. It takes time to become a general. Besides, our little man is not in Paris now, you know, and the good King Louis is at peace with the world."

"Why do you say the good King Louis, nurse? Is he so good? Only a short time ago I heard you say 'Long live the Emperor.'"

"The King rules, my love. The Emperor is no longer a person of power. There is a reason for it, and it makes a difference."

"But the Emperor will return. Countess de Vilma has told me so."

"The countess had better not tell any one else, my dear," said Madame Mortier, as she gently smoothed Selma's beautiful hair. "It may get abroad that she is here."

"And if it should?"

"The countess would be in great danger. The Bonapartists are regarded with suspicion. Countess de Vilma is here for a purpose. She has risked a great deal in coming to France, for there are many spies in the service of Fouché to look after and denounce those who are suspected of conspiracy against the King."

"Are things so bad as that then?"

"For the Bonapartists, quite; for the royalists, no. France is at peace. We do not now send our brave young men to meet the horrors of war. There are no more conscriptions. No more breaking of hearts. No more desolating of firesides. We can now live without catching our breath at the sound of every drum-beat."

"But if the Emperor should return—"

"May the good God forbid it! But come, my dear, let us think no more of it. Let us enjoy the peace we have. What shall I say to Monsieur le Baron?"

"What shall you say? Why—let me see—say—oh, well, say that I appreciate his kindness, and—and—well, tell him that I hope soon to see him. At present

oh, I leave it to you, dear nurse. Say something about a welcome here, or anything you like that may seem proper. My poor brain plays me sad tricks; I do not seem able to think at all."

"You poor dear. You shall not be disturbed again to-day."

Madame Mortier bent over and kissed her fondly, then re-arranged the cushions about her.

"There now, my precious, make yourself comfortable, and try to forget your troubles."

"Ah, nurse, I do try; but how can I forget that my good, kind papa is dead?"

She burst into tears again, and it was some time before Madame Mortier could console her. Just as she had succeeded in drying the young girl's tears, however, and while Selma was again contemplating the park, there was a light knock at the door from the corridor. Madame Mortier answered it, and ushered in a lady whom she announced as Countess de Vilma.

Madame la Comtesse had never been considered beautiful, but there was much about her that was attractive. She had fine eyes, a clear complexion, a good mouth, an aquiline nose, and a high forehead, over which her jet black hair was arranged in short curls, after the fashion of Madame de Staël. Her features were usually lighted with a pleasant smile, which made one forget that they had not been modelled after the prevailing type of beauty. Her figure was of medium height, and inclined to be stout, but its defects were considerably overcome by the splendid taste she displayed in her garments. As she entered, Selma greeted her with a smile.

"Ah, madame," said she, "it is so good of you to come to me."

The countess approached, and, kneeling beside the young girl, passed her hand affectionately over her sunny tresses.

"My dear Selma, I could not stay away longer," said she. "It grieves me to see you so sad. I thought I might be of some service to you."

"That is kind of you, madame. Let me assure you that your presence and sympathy are of great help to me."

Madame Mortier quietly left the room. Countess de Vilma turned as the door closed, and saw that there were no others present.

"We are alone, are we not, my dear?" said she.

"Yes, madame, quite. Madame Mortier is the only one who enters unannounced."

"And can you trust her?"

"Trust her!" exclaimed Selma, with a look of surprise. "Why, madame, she was my nurse. In fact, she is the only mother I have ever known. Besides, I have no reason to distrust any one."

The countess smiled, and again passed her hand over the golden tresses.

"You have not seen much of the world, my dear," said she benignly.

"And is the world so bad, madame, that we must distrust the people in it?"

Madame la Comtesse a rose, and seated herself in an easy chair opposite the young girl. The expression of her face was half pity, half cynicism, yet she smiled.

"The world is full of intrigue, my love," she said, after a moment spent in reading the young girl's innocent countenance.

"And why, dear countess?"

"Why? Because men and women are ambitious. Because there are evil designs of one against the other. Because a king reigns to-day, and an emperor ekes out an existence on a miserable little island called Elba. Ah, my dear, the world is so full of contention, intrigue, and political bickering that we know not whom to trust. Once this emperor had the world at his feet; he made kings and queens, and there was not a nation that did not tremble at his shadow; but now, through the treachery of those whom he has raised to the prominence they never could have gained without his help, he has been crushed and banished."

"But he will return, madame? He will not always be in exile?"

The pleasantness in the countess' face faded out; her eyes partly closed with the lids quivering; the lips closed tightly

for an instant and the masseter muscles contracted.

"Yes, he *shall* return," said she between her close set teeth, and with a decisive nod of the head. "The people do not love these Bourbons. The Emperor *must* return, and before very long too, or France will be lost to him forever."

Selma looked at Countess de Vilma in surprise, then, failing to comprehend, turned her attention to the view outside. The countess looked at her pityingly. She could not understand the young girl's innocence. She judged every one by herself, and she felt that anyone who did not understand the art of intrigue must be very simple indeed.

During the moment she sat watching Selma her countenance resumed its pleasantness, and when Selma turned to look at her again, it was surprising to find how amiable she had become.

"It seems so strange," said Selma, resuming the conversation. "I know so little of the world. I have lived contentedly here in this charming chateau, with no other company than my teachers and my nurse. Papa was always averse to company, and I think I have never cared for company until now. With my music and my painting my time has been fully occupied, and I have concerned myself very little about political matters. When you speak as you do, madame, I feel that I am very ignorant, and perhaps very stupid."

"Not stupid, my dear, but unsophisticated," said Countess de Vilma, with an amiable smile. "Yours has been a life of happiness. You have dreamed your time away in this beautiful chateau, and now you are just awaking to the stern realities of life. Methinks I envy you."

"Yes, I have been happy. Papa was so good to me, but now—oh, madame, I dread to think of the future, I shall be so lonely."

Tears gushed to her eyes again, but she struggled to suppress them. The countess, thinking to turn her thoughts into another channel, began commenting upon a picture upon the wall. It was a landscape in oil, and cleverly done.

"What a beautiful painting," said she.

Selma's face lighted up with a smile.

"You are kind to say so, madame," said she.

"Not at all, my dear Selma. I cannot help saying so, if I wish to be truthful. It is excellent."

"I am glad you like it. Papa liked it. I painted it for him."

"You, dear!" exclaimed the countess in surprise, at the same time rising and approaching the painting for a closer inspection.

"Yes, madame. These are all mine in this room."

"Indeed? Did you do that of the baron, yonder?"

"Yes, madame."

The countess passed over to look at it.

"Why, Selma, you are indeed an artist. Who was your instructor?"

"Monsieur David, madame."

"Ah, he was under the patronage of the Emperor. You have received first-class instruction, my dear, but it is very easy to see that you have talent."

"Thank you, madame."

"That is a speaking likeness of the baron."

The countess contemplated it for a moment in silence, then suddenly turned from it and introduced a new topic.

"Oh, by-the-bye," said she, "Have you seen the new baron yet?"

"No, madame," replied Selma. "He came only last night—oh yes, I did see him too, but it was in the dusk. He entered the room where papa lies while I

was there, but as I was somewhat alarmed, I hurried out and had no time to observe him closely."

Countess de Vilma turned and walked slowly back to her seat, with a thoughtful expression.

"I must see him, yet I must know his politics before we meet," said she, as if thinking aloud. "Selma, dear, you can help me here, if you will."

"I will, if I can, madame, but how?"

"Invite him here, and while I am hiding behind that screen there, question him about the Emperor. I wish to know if he favors His Majesty. You must know that my presence here is not without its object. Had the baron, your papa, lived, I should have accomplished my mission. Now it rests with the new baron whether I shall succeed. I am sure you are clever enough to draw him out, and after I have heard what he has to say, I shall know better how to proceed. Will you do this?"

"I will try, madame, but you must pardon me if I do not succeed. Shall I send for him now?"

"If you please. Meanwhile I will hide myself here. Whatever you do, be careful not to say anything about me."

"Very well, madame; it shall be as you wish."

Selma crossed the room and rang for her maid. In a moment the door opened and a rather attractive young woman entered.

"Julie," said Selma, "Present my compliments to Monsieur the new Baron de Banyan, and say that I shall be pleased to receive him here, if he can make it convenient to come."

The result of this message was that a few moments later de Banyan stood before her.

CHAPTER IV.

AGREEABLE IMPRESSIONS.

Colonel Baron Maurice de Banyan was in every respect a soldier. He thought as a soldier, and deported himself generally as a soldier. Marches, bivouacs and battle-fields had been his lot from very early manhood. The roar of cannon, the rattle of musketry, the clash of sabres had tended to give him a nerve of iron. Good comradeship, dangers, ambition, had made him daring and determined, and had instilled into him the idea that he must either win a general officer's epaulets, or die the glorious death of a brave soldier. Nevertheless, the moment he crossed the threshold of Selma's boudoir, and beheld her in all her innocent young beauty, there came into his life something which he had never known, and from that moment he felt there was something else to live for than a soldier's honors.

He had had his dream of fair women, and had formed his ideal; but his impoverished circumstances, acting like a talisman against matrimony, had developed in him a mannerism which seemed akin to indifference. His comrades often joked him about this apparent aversion to feminine loveliness, but with a smile he went his way, and, aside from those common-place pleasantries which are the outcome of politeness, nothing was ever noticed which might lead his friends to believe that any serious impression had been received. Now all was changed. It is surprising how the sound of one voice can touch the chord which sets the

pulses tingling. It is also surprising how quickly one recognizes a congenial spirit. The moment de Banyan heard the sound of Selma's voice there was born in him a new hope, a new desire, and if he stood with marked deference before her, it was only in accordance with his feelings of sympathy, respect and admiration.

"It was kind of you, mademoiselle, to send for me so soon," said he, with an expression of countenance which signified his pleasure. "I had not hoped for this honor until—"

He was about to say, until after the funeral, but noticing the expression of sadness upon the young girl's face, he finished with,

"Until some time later."

She looked at him with a smile, and there was something in her eyes which reassured him.

"It is kind of you, monsieur, to show me such consideration. Will you not be seated?"

De Banyan thanked her, and drawing a chair to a position which enabled him to catch a glimpse of the scenery from the window, and at the same time watch the beautiful girl before him, he settled himself for a pleasant chat, wondering what might be its outcome.

It was quite plain that Selma was unaccustomed to the presence of strange gentlemen. She was slightly embarrassed, but she had determined to do her best, and instead of taking observations,

in order to form an opinion of this new Baron de Banyan, she was busy with the task which she had undertaken for the Countess de Vilma, and was puzzling her brain for the proper thing to say.

"You arrived last night, did you not, monsieur," said she finally.

"Yes, mademoiselle. M. Argeneau found me in Paris yesterday. He told me what had happened, and urged me to come at once. I left Paris immediately."

"We are glad you came, monsieur. It was good of you to come at once."

"I felt that I might be of service, and came as quickly as possible."

"Let me assure you that your presence at Chateau Blanc just now has relieved me of considerable anxiety. I did not know to whom I might turn for advice in this sad emergency. Papa has never spoken to me of relatives, and I was not aware that I had any."

A shadow passed over de Banyan's face and left it gloomy.

"It has been seventeen years since I have had the honor of addressing my uncle," said he. "The force of circumstances has kept us apart, and I cannot imagine that he would wish to remind you of one who has been so negligent."

There was a moment's pause, during which Selma outlined the figure in the carpet with the toe of her dainty shoe.

"Then you and I are cousins," said she, looking up.

"It would seem so," answered de Banyan, pleasantly. "The late baron was my uncle."

"And have I no other relatives then?"

"I am the last of the male line, mademoiselle. Our family was not a prolific one. My grandparents had but two children — my father and my uncle. My father was killed in Egypt, at the Battle of the Pyramids. My mother died soon after. My uncle was made a baron by the Emperor Napoleon. You, mademoi-

selle, I believe, are his only child; consequently you and I are the only living members of the family."

"Then you are my only relative," said she, almost dreamily. But turning on him directly, and with an earnest expression, she continued:

"You say the Emperor made papa a baron?"

"Yes. It was for bravery displayed upon the field."

"I have heard my father speak in glowing terms of the Emperor. Perhaps it was through gratitude."

"Not gratitude alone, mademoiselle, but because of his great appreciation of the Emperor as a man and a ruler. He has had every reason to sound his encomiums."

"Then I infer, monsieur my cousin, that you can also sound the Emperor's praises?"

"I can indeed, mademoiselle, and I look forward to a time when the Emperor shall be recalled by the voice of the people."

"Then you are a true Bonapartist, monsieur?"

"I am for Napoleon, mademoiselle, and I can say very heartily, long live the Emperor."

So delighted was Countess de Vilma by this time that she immediately rose from her seat behind the screen and stepped into view. De Banyan sprang to his feet in amazement.

"*Mon Dieu*, madame, you here!" he cried.

"Yes, Monsieur le Baron," answered the countess, with a smile. "And now that I know who the Baron de Banyan is I have nothing to fear. I little thought that Colonel Maurice de Banyan, so gallant to me once, would prove so serviceable to me now."

"But, madame, do you not know that your presence in France has jeopardized

you? It is generally believed that you are at Elba with your husband. To find you here would arouse suspicion. There are spies in every quarter. I tremble for you, madame, for I fear that I could not protect you."

"But you would try, monsieur, would you not?" said the countess, with her most winning smile.

"Can you doubt me, madame? If so, permit me to say that my life is at the service of the wife of my old commander, and if the sacrifice would be in the interest of the Emperor's cause, I shall be all the more willing to make it."

"Ah, if there were more such men as you, baron, the Emperor would soon be reinstated. No, I do not doubt you; I have not so soon forgotten that you once risked your life to save mine at the crossing of the Beresina."

Then, turning to Selma, she continued:

"You see, my dear, your cousin, the baron, and I are old friends. I was quite ignorant of the fact that Colonel de Banyan and the new master of Chateau Blanc were one and the same gentleman."

"Then you have the advantage of me, madame," said Selma.

"Indeed? In what way?"

"You already know monsieur my cousin, while I have just made his acquaintance."

"Then you have a pleasure before you, my dear Selma. The acquaintance of Monsieur le Baron is worth cultivating."

"It is very good of you to say so, countess," said de Banyan, with a pleasant expression, and a low bow. "And permit me, mademoiselle my cousin, to assure you of my esteem and friendship."

"I shall be glad if we are to be friends," said Selma, with a slight blush.

"And I shall be honored, mademoiselle, in gaining such a friend," said de Banyan earnestly.

"Ah, baron," said the countess, with

a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, "I perceive that you two will get along very nicely."

"I sincerely hope so," exclaimed de Banyan with such warmth that the countess raised her eyebrows and smiled significantly.

"And poor me, baron," said the countess, with mock pensiveness. "I hope you will not forget me in your devotions."

De Banyan was equal to the emergency.

"How could I, countess, when the remembrance of you is such a happy dream?"

She beamed upon him a most benignant smile, and graciously motioned him to be seated, at the same time seating herself by the side of Selma, near the window.

"I presume, baron," said she, "that you have particularly noticed the state of affairs in Paris since the return of the Bourbons and the *emigres*?"

"Yes indeed, my dear countess, and I am greatly disappointed. The manner in which the King has imposed upon the people is really provoking. These audacious Bourbons are beginning where they left off. Such a thing as the Empire seems never to have existed. They have established their old customs, and have even gone so far as to train the soldiers after the principles of the period before the Revolution. At the Tuileries the people of the Faubourg St. Germain are lording it over those of the Empire in such a manner as to arouse indignation. The King is either being flattered and misled, or else he is a fool. The people are already clamoring against the return of the *emigres*, and it looks very much as though the time was ripening for a change."

"The change will come, baron. Indeed, it is sure to come. I have learned from the late Baron de Banyan that every soldier in the army carries the tri-colored cockade in his knapsack, ready for such

an emergency. We can depend upon the soldiers at any rate."

"The Bourbons have treated the soldiers badly, and they resent it. If any of them cry '*Vive le Roi*,' they usually add *sotto voce*, '*de Rome, et son petit papa*.' I was present at one of the reviews not long ago, and as the Count d'Artois passed along the line there was not a murmur in behalf of the King. Every man was silent. There was not a single '*Vive le Roi*' from the ranks. The men stood as stolid and sombre as if resenting some personal injury. It was quite significant, madame, that the soldiers still love the Emperor."

"Then our course is easy."

"It is only a matter of time."

"I shall have good news for the Emperor when I return to Elba."

"If he does not come in the spring it will be too late. Urge him to make haste, countess, and remind him of the fact that all the half-pay officers at St. Denis are ready to join him as soon as he arrives in France."

The countess was thoughtful for a moment, and her face became troubled.

"I doubt, baron, if he could hold out much longer than the spring," said she, presently. "He has depended upon receiving the subsidy stipulated by the treaty of Fontainebleau, on the strength of which he has made heavy expenditures in the interests of the island, and has used up the greater part of his own personal treasure. The Allies have not fulfilled their promises to him, and unless something is done very soon he will be on the verge of famine. He will even be obliged to disband his brave grenadiers, who have so nobly gone into exile with him."

"*Mon Dieu*, madame!" exclaimed de Banyan. "Is it so bad as that?"

"It may be even worse."

"Then something must be done at once."

"Negotiations have already been made with certain bankers of Genoa and Milan for loans, and these bankers have advanced large sums. But even this is not enough."

"Then we must do something for him here in France," exclaimed de Banyan earnestly.

"I have ventured secretly into France in the Emperor's interests," continued the countess, after a moment's pause. "On the strength of the friendship which existed between the Emperor and the late baron, I have made this chateau my headquarters. Here I await the arrival of my secret agent, Monsieur de Saint-Breton, who is negotiating some financial business in the interest of Napoleon. This negotiation is nominally in my husband's behalf, but is really for the benefit of the Emperor. I am expecting monsieur my agent soon, and until he arrives I must trespass upon your hospitality."

"Ah, countess, if you knew what pleasure it gives me to be of service, not only to you but to the Emperor, you would have no doubts about my hospitality."

"For myself, I thank you most heartily. As for the Emperor, I am sure he will appreciate your loyalty. I shall certainly speak of it to him."

"Tell him, also, madame, that my sword—nay, my life—is at his service."

"Ah, if there were more men like you, baron!"

"There are thousands of the same spirit, madame."

"True, but there are a greater number of an averse spirit."

"But when they see him again, and remember their victories, their glories, their prosperities while he was their chosen Emperor, this aversion will change to love, and every heart will throb in welcome."

Countess de Vilma looked at de Banyan with an expression of gratitude.

"I thank you, baron, for those encouraging words," said she, in a voice that trembled with emotion.

"I cannot help speaking them, madame. When I recall the fact that the Coalition have robbed him of his wife and child, and are treating him like a brigand in their intention to transport him like a vile criminal to some distant island of the Atlantic, I feel that he has a right to defend himself against proceedings contrary to justice and morality; and, in so doing, he is not merely a general seeking to replace himself at the head of his troops, a sovereign anxious to regain his sceptre, but a husband and father, bent on regaining possession of his wife and child. There are others, madame, who realize this fact even better than I do, and it is

with their assistance that he will accomplish this great undertaking."

Selma had listened attentively to the conversation, and when de Banyan ceased she beamed upon him a smile of approval. She believed him to be a brave, true man, and she was proud that he was her cousin. He had risen as he spoke, and when he finished, they understood that he was about to take his leave, whereupon Selma rose and extended her hand to him.

"You are very good, my cousin," she murmured, as he bowed over her hand, as was the fashion of the times, and kissed it.

"I sincerely hope you will have no occasion to alter your good opinion," he replied, with a smile.

Then, turning to the countess, he made his obeisance, and left the room.

CHAPTER V.

SILENCE IS GOLDEN.

The funeral was over. With considerable pomp, and the presence of many sympathising friends and people of the country surrounding Chateau Blanc, the late Baron de Banyan had been laid to rest in the family vault. Several days had passed, and the new Baron de Banyan had finally established himself in his uncle's chateau. There had been the visit of the Notary, and the reading of the will. There had been the necessary legal proceedings which serve to confirm the rights of a successor. There had prevailed the customary obsequiousness on the part of the legal adviser, which suggests a hope of further patronage, and finally, there had been the exit of monsieur the Notary, and the beginning of a new life for de Banyan.

There was much to think about, much to talk about, and likewise much to do concerning the late baron's affairs, conse-

quently de Banyan and his secretary, Argeneau, were busily engaged in the library with papers and documents.

Argeneau had a splendid opportunity to exercise his loquacity, and, despite the work in hand, he seemed unusually amiable. De Banyan learned much from this *moulin a paroles* concerning his uncle's circumstances, and received such a vivid description of the estate, that he felt it unnecessary to go over it for any other purpose than to satisfy his curiosity. It seemed large enough, it was certainly good enough, and he felt that he would be quite at ease during the rest of his life. Even the room in which he was engaged, with its beautifully frescoed walls and ceiling, its rich carpet, its splendid furniture and delightful pictures, to say nothing of its books and bookcases, gave evidence of considerable expenditure, and consequently suggested a certain amount

of comfort ; and since hitherto all he had ever owned were his regimentals, his horse, his sword, and all the comforts he had ever known were those which occasionally befall the lot of a soldier in active service, whose memory teems with reminiscences of the camp-fire, bivouacs, forced marches and bad weather, he was certain that he could fully appreciate his inheritance, and he was sorry indeed that he had ever been forced to keep aloof from his uncle on account of the petty quarrel which had occurred in his earlier days. Still, he felt that his uncle had been overbearing and bitter, and after all, he believed he was justified in his resentment. Then, when he remembered that the estate had been strictly entailed, and that he was the last of the line, he realized that he would have come into possession sooner or later, and his pride whispered to him that to unbend even a little toward his uncle's memory would be asking too much. Yet, he was of a generous nature, and finally, waiving the whisperings of pride and vindictiveness, his heart grew heavy with sincere sorrow and regret. He had always honored his uncle with his respect, and he had not been slow to claim relationship whenever the military merits of the late General de Banyan had been the topic of discussion among his brother officers. Therefore, when he recalled the noble face, the grey hairs, the heroic brow, he felt quite ashamed of himself that he had ever been so obstinate, so resentful, so boyish.

His uncle had left him everything. The strange thing about the will was that no provision whatever had been made for Selma. He was greatly troubled over this ; it seemed so unusual. Selma was indeed a charming girl. She had made a decided impression upon him, and he wondered why she had been ignored. True, she was only an adopted daughter, but it seemed an unnatural thing to leave her

unprovided for. But while he was pondering the matter and wondering what he should do, Argeneau came to his assistance with a document which read to the effect that certain properties in Paris had been conferred upon Mademoiselle Selma by the Emperor Napoleon, from which she derived an annual revenue of thirty thousand francs. The late baron was appointed her trustee and guardian, and in case of his demise, should such a thing occur before her maturity or marriage, it was stipulated that the succeeding heir to the estates should assume the guardianship. De Banyan felt easier after this, yet what he most wished to know was not to be found.

"So the secret dies with him," said he, after he had read the document for the third time.

"The secret, monsieur?" said Argeneau, with a rising inflection.

"Yes. The secret of her birth and parentage."

Argeneau stopped his work, placed his elbows upon the desk before him, and, while biting the feather end of his quill, looked steadily at the baron with a quizzical expression.

"Do you look upon it as a secret?" said he finally.

"It is indeed a mystery to me."

"Oh, I thought you knew."

"I have not even a faint idea."

"Do you know the story of Madame Fourés?"

"I have heard one or two versions of it."

"Have you ever seen her?"

"She was pointed out to me once in Paris."

"She is a beautiful woman, I believe?"

"Remarkably so."

"Fair hair, blue eyes, pink complexion, and all that sort of thing?"

"Yes, a very beautiful woman indeed. I remember her quite well. When I was

told that she had been Napoleon's mistress at Cairo, I took a special observation."

"You have seen Mademoiselle Selma?"

"Oh, yes."

"Did you not notice her resemblance to Madame Fourés?"

"*Mon Dieu!* I never thought of it."

"It is there, nevertheless."

"Ah," exclaimed de Banyan, leaning forward, "perhaps you are right; and now that I think of it, the mouth, the chin, the smile are his. *Parbleu!* There is a strong resemblance to both. But, *Mon Dieu!* What are we thinking of? We must not malign this poor girl upon such weak evidence. She does not deserve it. She is gentle, lovable. She has an individuality which is worthy of respect. She thinks the baron was her father. She must never know that he was not."

"Do you think it can be kept from her very much longer, monsieur?" said Argeneau, with something in his voice which sounded like a sneer.

"*Parbleu!* It must be," exclaimed de Banyan, smiting the desk with his hand, and showing an earnestness which made Argeneau uneasy. "Mademoiselle Selma is supposed to be my cousin. The man who says a word against her good name shall answer to me for it."

"But will she not wish to know for herself?" said Argeneau, a little disconcerted.

"Why should she?"

"She might wish to know something of her mother."

"She believes the baron, my uncle, to have been her father. Since she has never known her mother, it follows that my uncle has told her something to the effect that her mother died when she was born, or when she was an infant."

"Still, you are not sure."

"I am certain, Monsieur Argeneau,

that my uncle was not a fool," exclaimed de Banyan, with sudden asperity.

"Oh, of course not," said Argeneau, with a smile. "What am I thinking of?"

He immediately resumed his work, as if dismissing the subject from his thoughts. But once during the conversation there had been an evil expression in his eyes which de Banyan did not like. It annoyed him. While Argeneau continued to assort papers, de Banyan leaned back in his chair, and with his hands behind his head watched his secretary with a significant concentration. Finally he leaned forward and laid a paper-weight upon some documents at his side.

"Argeneau," said he, with a deliberation that sent a tremor over the secretary's frame, "is this affair known to any one besides Madame Mortier and yourself?"

"I believe not, monsieur."

"Then let me be understood. You are the only man who can ruin mademoiselle's happiness. One word from you would crush her spirit for ever. Now mark me. My uncle has seen fit to trust you. On the strength of this recommendation I have taken you into my service, but I do not know you sufficiently to have that implicit confidence in you which it seems my uncle has had. You may be perfectly trustworthy; I do not say you are not. But I *do* say (here de Banyan's brow darkened) that if ever you so much as hint to Mademoiselle Selma, or to any one else, the true state of things, I shall compel you to measure swords with me, and I can assure you that with the sword I am no novice. Do you understand me?"

Argeneau's face was livid; de Banyan's was as dark as midnight.

"You need not be alarmed, Monsieur le Baron," said Argeneau, as soon as he could speak without trembling. "Let me remind you of the fact that I am your private secretary, and I know my business."

"Very well. Now be good enough to send Madame Mortier to me, and remain within call until you are wanted."

Had de Banyan seen the expression of his secretary's face as he left the room he would have had good cause for alarm, for in it was all that was evil and sinister.

When Madame Mortier came, de Banyan motioned her to a seat, and for a moment regarded her with a look that certainly made her feel very uncomfortable.

"Madame," said he finally, "we have been making strange discoveries concerning Mademoiselle Selma. It seems that you were her nurse at Cairo. I wish you to tell me all you know about this affair. You need not be afraid, for since my uncle has made it appear that she was his daughter, it certainly shall continue to appear that she is my cousin. I may also add that she is well provided for, and that I am interested in her happiness."

Madame Mortier reflected.

"Do I understand, monsieur, that you did not know that mademoiselle was the late baron's adopted daughter?" said she finally.

"Precisely, madame. I have lived apart from my uncle for many years, and know nothing whatever of his affairs, save a few rumors which were current among the officers of the barracks. One of these rumors was to the effect that he had married a native of Cairo while in Egypt, but that she had died before the army returned to France."

"The rumor was correct, monsieur. I was with her when she died."

"Then this Egyptian was really his wife?"

"Yes, they were really married. Bonaparte himself sanctioned the marriage."

"Then there were no children of this marriage?"

"Yes, monsieur, there was one. But it died a few days after birth."

"And madame, it's mother?"

"She died a few days later."

"Indeed?" said de Banyan, with a look of surprise.

Then lowering his brows, which had risen slightly, he continued:

"And mademoiselle, what of her?"

"At the time the dead babe was removed, mademoiselle was placed in it's cradle."

"Ah! well, go on."

"Madame was in a very critical state. The knowledge of the death of her child would have killed her. Monsieur le Baron was distracted. At the time he was aide-de-camp to General Bonaparte——"

"Say the Emperor, madame, if you please," interrupted de Banyan, with a frown.

"He was General Bonaparte then, monsieur," replied Madame Mortier, rather crisply. "I speak of him as he was then."

"Oh, very well, then, proceed."

"Monsieur le Baron was also a great friend of General Junot. At the time of the death of his child, Monsieur le Baron went to General Junot and told him how much he feared to let his wife know of the death of their babe. I never knew how it came about, but in a very short time the dead babe was removed and mademoiselle was left in it's place. I was told by Monsieur le Baron that a woman whose husband had been killed in battle at St. Jean d'Arc, had given birth to the child about the same time that madame had been delivered, but had died a few hours afterward. Monsieur le Baron charged me to treat this babe as his own, and never let madame know."

"Then you know nothing of her parentage?"

"Nothing, except that the father of mademoiselle had been a very great friend of Monsieur le Baron, and for this reason

he resolved to adopt the babe, after his wife died."

"Does mademoiselle know anything of this?"

"She knows absolutely nothing, monsieur. She believes the baron to have been her father."

"She must never know the truth, madame."

"I cannot remember ever having wished her to know the truth, monsieur."

"Very well, madame, I have every confidence in you. Her happiness shall not be marred. That is all. For the present let me wish you *au revoir*."

After madame had courtesied and left the room, de Banyan called his secretary.

"Argeneau," said he, as the secretary advanced toward him, "will you have the goodness to tell me upon what grounds you base your suspicion of mademoiselle's origin?"

Argeneau hesitated, and for a moment contemplated the floor. He was not so anxious to talk now. He seemed quite disconcerted, and tried to revive himself with a pinch of snuff. Presently he raised his head and looked directly at de Banyan with an expression which seemed to suggest that he knew more than he wished to tell.

"There was a rumor," said he, finally, "That Madame Fourés was delivered of a child at Cairo. It seems this child suddenly disappeared. No doubt you have learned something of mademoiselle's history from Madame Mortier. You, yourself, have noted the resemblance of mademoiselle to Madame Fourés, you also remarked the resemblance of the mouth, chin and smile to—"

"Tush!" exclaimed de Banyan, in ill humor. "There is nothing in that. If this is all the ground you have for your belief, I would advise you to think as little of it as possible. Resemblances amount to nothing."

Argeneau suddenly stepped to the desk

at which he had been at work, and very deliberately selected a paper therefrom.

"I beg you, Monsieur le Baron, to read this document once more," said he, unfolding it and handing it to de Banyan. "You will perceive that the Emperor has settled upon mademoiselle a handsome income. Do you think for one moment that he did so out of sheer generosity?"

"Bah!" exclaimed de Banyan, throwing down the paper and settling back in his chair. "When the Emperor made my uncle a baron, he also made some provision for mademoiselle. It may have been generosity that prompted him, or it may not have been. The Emperor is not a man to do a thing without a good reason."

"He had a reason, beyond a doubt."

"Then you think—"

"That the Emperor knows more about the origin of mademoiselle than either you or I."

De Banyan gave vent to a jeering laugh.

"M. Argeneau, you are laboring under a delusion," said he, rising from his chair. "A wild hallucination," he added, as he began to restore his papers and documents to their respective receptacles. "A horseback ride, followed by a knock on the head, might do you good," he continued, as he locked the drawers of his desk, and started for the doorway. "But remember that I have warned you against expressing your opinions upon this matter to any one," said he, just as he was about to pass out into the corridor.

After the door had closed, Argeneau remained for a time in a meditative mood. Then with a shrug of his shoulders, he seated himself and fell to work. Presently he paused, placed his elbow upon the desk, rested his chin between his thumb and forefinger, stared a while at the wall, then with a deep sigh, uttered the word "patience," and settled down to work.

CHAPTER VI.

A DECLARATION.

The room in which Argeneau was at work overlooked the gardens. His desk was so close to the window that by simply turning his head he could see the beautiful perspective beyond. Several times he had paused to look out, but nothing seemed to interest him, and he resumed his work. Presently, however, the sound of horses' feet prompted him to look out more quickly than before. This time he discovered de Banyan mounted upon a fine charger, which moved down the avenue at a gallop. Argeneau watched him for a moment with admiration, then observing him salute someone, looked to see who it could be. Selma, in her black mourning costume, stood among some roses in the gardens, with a smile upon her sad, pale face.

Argeneau watched her closely for a moment, then tried to resume his work, but there was a greater charm without. He grew restless. Time and again he let his attention wander from the work before him to the person of Selma in the gardens. Finally he threw down his pen, rose from his chair, and with hands behind him, paced the room with measured tread, looking out frequently as he passed the window.

Several times as he paused at the window he helped himself to snuff in a manner peculiar to himself, and which had in it suggestions of affectation. There was an air of affectation in the pose and symmetry of his lithe, slender form, and there was a suggestion of foppishness in his

dress. His thick, brown hair was curled in the most precise manner. His ruffled shirt front, lace cravat, and white stockings were neatness in themselves. About his throat he wore a black silk ribbon with a golden trinket attached to it. His trousers and waistcoat were of a rich, light-colored material, while his coat, fashioned in the latest style, was of a deep brown. His features were of the aquiline type and finely cut. About the brow and mouth there was a suggestion of shrewdness, but in the eye, to the close observer, there was something unsatisfactory. It was small, dark, deep-set, and had a very unsteady gaze. Finally, there was a striking evidence of self-complacency, self-importance, and presumption.

As he paced the floor there was a frown upon his brow, and at frequent intervals the muscles of his jaw contracted. Presently he turned abruptly and advanced to a curtain at the other end of the room. This he drew aside and disclosed to view a collection of swords and daggers of various patterns. Selecting a beautiful pearl-hilted rapier, he began an exercise in parry and thrust, which gave evidence of considerable knowledge of the fencing art. After half an hour's combat with an imaginary opponent he replaced the rapier and again sought the window.

Selma was now seated in a pretty little summer-house, arranging her flowers into a bouquet. The summer-house was near the drive-way, and overgrown with a running vine.

Presently Argeneau put on his hat and left the room. A few moments later he was sauntering down the drive-way toward the summer-house. He held an open book before him, and seemed absorbed with its contents. His steps were directed, apparently unconscious of Selma's proximity, to where she was sitting. It was not many moments before he reached the entrance of the summer-house.

"Oh, pardon me, mademoiselle," he cried, affecting to be surprised at seeing her, "I was not aware of your presence here. Being relieved of my morning duties, I came hither to read. I hope I have not disturbed you."

He was about to withdraw.

"I pray you, Monsieur Argeneau, do not retire," said Selma with a smile. "You shall read to me."

"I fear, mademoiselle, my book will not interest you."

"Why then, what book have you."

"It is an English work."

"Ah, but I understand English. It is not a translation, is it?"

"No, it is in the original text, but its contents may not be to your taste."

"Of what does it treat then?"

"Of the possibilities and frailties of human nature."

"Could anything be more interesting?"

"To me, no. The study of human nature is so fascinating that I have revelled for many an hour in the various portrayals of character which my author's genius has accomplished."

"Why, who is this remarkable author, monsieur?"

"It is William Shakespeare, mademoiselle," said he, with a smile that was somewhat mischievous.

Selma smiled also.

"Now you are jesting with me, monsieur," said she, good naturedly. "The idea of your being so mysterious

about Shakespeare, whose works are so cleverly translated into our language, is really amusing. But I can agree with you, for I have read a number of his dramas, both in the French and the English. He has indeed made some wonderful character sketches. I would that France had his equal. It is true we have Racine, Rosseau, Corneille, Voltaire, and even Madame de Staël, who wrote Corinne, and the famous *De l'Allemagne*, the first edition of which Napoleon caused to be destroyed, but we have not the genius of this celebrated Englishman."

"The genius of France, mademoiselle, is that of a soldier."

"True, but is not that a cruel genius? A cruel ambition? Ah, monsieur, think of the hearts it has broken, of the tears it has caused, of the lives it has jeopardized and wasted. War is so terrible."

"But this warrior's genius was necessary to France, mademoiselle."

"Then tell me, Monsieur Argeneau, why have they dethroned him?"

"Because his usefulness is at an end. Because he has forgotten everything but himself, and has become detrimental to his country."

"But suppose he should return, monsieur?"

"He will never dare."

"But suppose the people should recall him?"

"Then we must expect war until France is crushed and humbled to the dust."

"But may not France be victorious?"

"She will never be victorious again. Her rule over nations is at an end. The Emperor's great armies have so drained the country of men that only boys and old men are left."

"How terrible!"

"It is terrible, mademoiselle. We have had enough of war. Our nation, once so brilliant and prosperous, is now like a wounded lion, discomfited and distraught."

"But these Bourbons—"

"They have brought peace, mademoiselle, and we are glad of their return."

"But the King, it seems, is not liked. I heard monsieur, my cousin the baron, say that King Louis was not carrying out a good policy towards his people."

"Monsieur le Baron is a Bonapartist," exclaimed Argeneau, with rather more asperity than he was aware of.

Selma was quick to notice it, but slow to give evidence of her observation.

"And I presume Monsieur Argeneau is a true royalist," said she, looking at her flowers, without the slightest change of manner.

Argeneau's reply was guarded.

"I love my country, mademoiselle, and approve of anything that may bring prosperity."

Selma did not reply to this remark, but turned her attention to the arrangement of her flowers.

Argeneau watched her with an expression of profound admiration, and for a moment there was a delicious silence, in which he feasted his soul upon her fascinating beauty. The very fact that he was near her made him happy and even daring.

Presently she held her flowers up before her admiringly.

"Are they not beautiful, monsieur?" said she, with a pleasant smile.

"As beautiful as the hand that holds them," said Argeneau, with considerable ardor. "They would do justice to the taste of the Empress Josephine."

Selma looked up quickly, but with a dubious expression, then a ripple of laughter, that sounded like dulcet music, burst from her lips.

"You flatter me, monsieur," she cried.

Argeneau's manner suddenly became that of an enamored swain in the presence of his enamorata.

"Can there be flattery in speaking the truth, Mademoiselle Selma?" said he in a low soft tone that trembled with emotion.

His face betrayed his feelings. His manner caused Selma to lool! up in surprise.

"I do not understand you, Monsieur Argeneau," she said, with the slightest reserve of manner.

"You mean you *will* not understand me."

Selma became indignant.

"I mean I *do not* understand you, Monsieur Argeneau," she said decisively, and with a look that was almost haughty.

Although Argeneau felt the rebuff, he was not easily subdued.

"I can explain myself in three words," said he, with considerable assurance.

"Then, if it is so easy, I pray you do so at once."

He bent towards her with a radiant face.

"Ah, mademoiselle, can you not see that I love you," said he in a tone much softer than before.

The expression that swept over Selma's face had in it surprise, indignation, contempt. She sprang to her feet and drew herself up to her full height.

"How dare you!" she cried, with flashing eyes.

The next moment she was flying down the pathway towards the chateau.

Argeneau's face displayed chagrin and disappointment. Then an evil expression came into it that would have alarmed Selma, had she seen it.

But he was not left long for reflection. Selma had no sooner disappeared within the chateau than the sound of hoof beats upon the gravel brought him to his senses.

A horse was tearing down the driveway without a rider. Argeneau quickly recognized the animal, and remembering having seen de Banyan upon him only a short time since, naturally concluded that an accident had happened.

Leaving the summer-house, he hurried to the stables, gave the alarm, and with two servants, set out in search of Monsieur le Baron.

CHAPTER VII.

ANXIETIES WILL NEVER CEASE.

Upon leaving the summer-house so precipitately, Selma sought her own apartments, locked the doors, and excluded everyone. She was highly exasperated. That Argeneau should have the audacity to presume upon her kindness was indeed annoying. Argeneau, her father's *protege*! Argeneau, her father's secretary! Oh, it was humiliating! How could he, and upon what could he have presumed? Upon her leniency, her kindness? Then he was a blind, presumptuous dolt. Upon her friendliness to him in the summer-house? Then he was a conceited ignoramus, and deserved to be regarded with contempt. How angry she felt! How could he even dare to entertain thoughts of love toward her, much less utter them? She, the daughter of a wealthy baron. He, a menial in her father's service. Oh, it was outrageous! It was insulting! Time and again she asked herself what she had done to prompt such a confession. She had tried to be kind and generous to all. She had only treated Argeneau as she would have treated anyone who bore the reputation of behaving himself. Finally she was more annoyed with herself than with Argeneau. Then she began to feel sorry for him, and after her indignation had spent itself, she threw herself upon a divan near the window and wept bitterly. Why she wept she could not tell, unless it was from a reaction of feelings.

While lying there, she was suddenly startled by a hurried rapping at the door. She did not answer, but rose to a sitting posture and listened. Another rap met with no better result.

"Mam'selle, mam'selle," cried an excited voice from the corridor.

She recognized it at once. It was her maid, Julie, and the quick, almost breath-

less cry, aroused her from herself. She sprang up and opened the door. Julie entered with an excited countenance.

"Oh, Mam'selle, mam'selle," she cried, out of breath.

"Why, Julie, what is it? What has happened?" said Selma, beginning to take alarm.

"Monsieur le Baron, mam'selle, Monsieur le Baron has met with an accident. They are bringing him to the chateau unconscious."

Heavens! What a pang shot through Selma's heart. She reeled, and stretched out her hand for support. Julie caught her.

"You say there has been an accident?" she gasped.

"Yes, mam'selle."

"And they are bringing monsieur to the chateau unconscious?"

"Yes, mam'selle, he is badly hurt."

"But—but he is not—not—dead, Julie?"

Selma's voice had sunk to a whisper.

"Oh no, mam'selle. They say he is alive, but—"

"*Mon Dieu*, Julie! are you sure? Run—run quickly, bring me word that he is not dead. Run girl, run. I must know the worst."

Julie hastened to obey her mistress. When the door closed Selma dropped upon her knees and raised her pale face to heaven.

"Oh, sweet Mother," she murmured. "Spare him, he is all I have in the world."

Then she slowly turned her eyes to the floor in a reflective manner.

"Ah, Maurice, Maurice," she murmured, "why have you been so reckless? Do you not know that this is torture to me?"

But her soliloquy was cut short by approaching footsteps. She sprang to her feet and waited in suspense. She

even opened the door in anticipation of her maid's return. But it was not Julie. It was Countess de Vilma.

"Why Selma!" exclaimed the countess, "What is it? What has happened? You look so frightened, child."

"Have you not heard, madame?"

"Heard, heard what?"

"That he has been hurt in an accident."

"He, whom? I don't understand you."

"Monsieur, my cousin. They are bringing him to the chateau unconscious."

"*Mon Dieu*, child! Who has told you?"

"Julie, madame. I have just sent her to learn the worst."

"But it may not be so bad as you think, dear Selma. Come, let us look upon the bright side of it. Accidents do not always prove fatal. Julie will soon be here, and I am sure she will bring better news."

The countess folded Selma in her arms and led her to a divan; then seating themselves, they waited the arrival of Julie.

"Oh, madame," cried Selma, "if it should be the worst, what shall I do? I shall be utterly alone in the world."

Madame la Comtesse drew Selma's head down to her breast and kissed her pale cheek.

"Why, my darling," she said, "there are many things you could do. For instance, you could close up this establishment, go to Paris, and find a husband."

Selma raised her head quickly, and gazed at the countess with a dubious expression.

"Ah, madame, you are jesting with me," she cried reproachfully.

"Not at all, dear Selma. I was never more serious in my life."

"But, madame, would I find anyone like—like—him?"

A deep blush suffused Selma's cheek, and, as the countess beheld it, she was convinced of what she had already surmised. She caught Selma's face between

her hands, and gazed earnestly at the confused countenance.

"Ah, Selma," said she, "I see how the wind blows. You love this man."

At this juncture the maid, Julie, appeared, with the news that Monsieur le Baron had recovered consciousness, and was not so badly hurt as was at first supposed. Whereupon the tension of their anxiety gave way and the two ladies breathed easier.

"Now, Julie, find Madame Mortier, and tell her to be as useful as she can," said Selma. "Then return to me as soon as you have done so."

In a moment Selma and the countess were alone again.

"Well, Selma," said the countess, drawing the beautiful young girl to her, with a motherly affection. "Am I not right? You do love him, do you not?"

Selma drew away from the countess with a confused smile. Then the smile faded, and her face became very thoughtful, the while her pretty fingers played with the tassel of the cushion beside her.

"I do not know, madame," said she presently. "I do not think one can learn to love so soon. But Monsieur le Baron is the nearest approach to my ideal that I have ever seen. Besides, he is my cousin, and the master of Chateau Blanc. I have read in books of love at first sight, but for me, love must come through association with a noble character. I do not know my cousin's character sufficiently to judge, but he gives the best promise of any man I have ever met. His coming has relieved me of many anxieties, and I do not feel so utterly alone. My sympathy for him, I think, is quite natural; he is my relative. You say I love him; I am not sure; and yet I feel that I could love him, if he is all that my impressions suggest. How different he is from—well, I was about to say Monsieur Argeneau."

"Why, Selma! What an absurd com

parison! What, Argeneau, the secretary? Oh, come, my dear, Monsieur le Baron would not like that."

The countess laughed heartily, and Selma laughed too, but hers was not the merriment of her companion.

"You must remember, dear countess, that I have not seen many gentlemen with whom I can compare monsieur my cousin."

"Well, Selma dear, of all the men I know, there is not one more worthy of esteem than Monsieur le Baron. I owe my life to him. If you ever succeed in winning his love, you should be the happiest woman in France."

"Let us not speak of it, madame."

"Why not, dear Selma? I am sure Monsieur le Baron is a noble fellow."

"But if I should discover that his love is essential to my happiness, I do not flatter myself that I could win it. Then, dear countess, my life would be very wretched indeed."

The countess broke into a merry laugh.

"Why Selma," she cried, "do you not know that a woman as beautiful as you are, could have the world at her feet if she wanted it?"

"Oh, why do you speak so, madame?" said Selma, impatiently. "I fear you are jesting with me."

"Believe me, I was never more in earnest. But there, my dear, if I displease you, I will say no more."

There was a vast difference between these two. The one, young, unsophisticated, fresh and beautiful. The other, middle-aged, experienced, dark and faded.

Countess de Vilma's life had been a strange one. Like the Duchess of Dantzic, she had followed the army at the side of her husband; or, with a canteen at her hip, had figured among the wounded

soldiers as a ministering angel. She was in Russia, and it is a wonder that she survived that terrible campaign. In fact she nearly lost her life at the crossing of the Beresina, when the bridges were demolished by the crush of struggling soldiers upon them. But, owing to the timely succor of Colonel de Banyan, who brought her ashore at the risk of his own life, she had survived to participate in the Prussian campaign which followed. And after all was lost, and her husband had volunteered to go into exile, as an officer of the devoted grenadiers, who followed Napoleon to Elba, she went with them. When the new court was formed at Porto-Ferrajo, with the Princess Borghèse at its head, she was appointed one of the ladies in waiting, and from that time became thoroughly imbued with the idea that the Emperor should return to France. This enthusiasm, stimulated by that of Princess Borghèse, who had become an earnest worker in her imperial brother's behalf, prompted her to make the present adventure into France, and it is owing to this that we find her at Chateau Blanc. Selma was greatly pleased with her, and had lost no time in cultivating her acquaintance, so that at the present moment they were greatly attached to each other. There was something so kind and sympathetic about Madame la Comtesse, that after the death of her supposed father, Selma found her a great consolation, and dreaded to think of the time when the countess would be compelled to return to Elba.

It was not long before Julie returned with the news that the doctor had been sent for, and then Selma and the countess busied themselves with whatever they could think of that might convey to de Banyan a sense of their profound sympathy.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RESULT OF THE ACCIDENT.

News travels fast. That Monsieur le Baron had been thrown from his horse and hurt, was a topic of conversation among the servants of the chateau for the remainder of the day. Some thought it an ill omen. Some could very easily account for it. Some could not account for it. Some did not pretend to account for it. Finally the truth was known. Monsieur le Baron's horse had bolted, and had dashed in among some trees. Monsieur le Baron, having suddenly come in contact with a heavy limb, and being unable to withstand the shock of collision, had been swept from his saddle and dashed to the earth. Monsieur le Baron being more fragile than Mother Earth, had, of course, got the worst of it, and was now nursing a fractured arm.

Doctor Blauvelt, however, declared that there were no internal injuries, and gave everyone to understand that Monsieur le Baron would soon be around again, although he would be compelled to carry his arm in a sling for some time to come.

It was indeed provoking. To be housed up with a broken arm was decidedly irksome. But after all, there was at least some consolation in the prospect of an association with his cousin Selma and the Countess de Vilma. Therefore, with the best grace that the occasion would permit, he endeavored to adapt himself to present circumstances. It was some time in the afternoon before the doctor succeeded in setting his arm. It

was still later in the day before a powerful opiate had taken effect, and while Morpheus held sway over his senses, the sun went down behind the hazy hills in a flare of golden glory.

The ladies had been very solicitous; Selma especially, and it is possible that her gentle solicitude may have had more to do with easing de Banyan's sufferings than the doctor's powerful opiate.

The pretty bouquet of forget-me-nots, in a neat little vase which stood on a table near at hand, had been brought in by Selma's maid, Julie, with her mistress's compliments, and an expression of commiseration. The dainty luncheon which came in later on, had been prepared by Selma herself, and as de Banyan ate it, he tried to think of another time when a woman's gentle attentions had been such a balm to his wounds, but could not recall a single instance.

Argeneau also had been very attentive. He could not leave Monsieur le Baron's side, and he exhibited considerable feeling over the accident. Even after de Banyan had fallen asleep, he remained in the room, in case of emergency, and left it only long enough to get his meals. His countenance, however, was not nearly so placid as usual, and it is just possible that the experience of the morning with Selma was still prevalent in his mind, with all its disturbing features. That he was in love with her could hardly be doubted, but it may have been that her fortune had more to do with his affections than the fascin-

ating young lady herself, although she was indeed worthy of a far superior man than he. Still, he seemed ready to make the best of it, and bide his time. Then, too, it was possible that he feared the displeasure of his new master, and hoped to win his good opinion before he should hear of the affair in the summer house. He was satisfied that de Banyan would never hear of it from Mlle. Selma. Her pride would prevent that. Yet it was again possible that someone had overheard, and he felt uneasy. As a solace he endeavored to read. But judging from the number of times he looked up from his book and gazed absently into vacancy, reading did not produce the desired effect.

Had he known de Banyan better, however, he would have had occasion to flatter himself that his attentions had made a favorable impression. De Banyan was beginning to like him, and yet he wondered at the attachment. There was something about this shrewd, yet communicative young man which at first aroused de Banyan's distrust, and despite the fact that he was ingratiating himself into his master's favor, de Banyan continued to regard him with a vague suspicion. Several times since the conversation in the library that morning he had pondered the question of discharging him from his service. But when he remembered that Argeneau was acquainted with every detail of his recently inherited estate, he realized that his services were invaluable, and to dispense with them would be decidedly injudicious. Besides, having him near, he could prevent the circulation of any theory concerning Selma which Argeneau might entertain.

Since women had never interested him very much, it seemed strange to de Banyan that he should be so deeply concerned about Selma. It is true he had some doubts of her origin, and the more he

pondered Argeneau's theory, the more the secretary's views seemed possible. Yet when he remembered the soothing effect Selma's presence had over him, and how good and clever she seemed, he was determined to withhold judgment until he knew the truth, and, though naturally curious, he was not anxious to know that which, if revealed, might become a cruel piece of knowledge to all concerned. He could not help remarking the resemblance she bore to the Bonapartes, and yet, as he turned this over in his mind, he concluded again that resemblances amounted to nothing. Besides, it appeared to him that Madame Mortier's story was the more plausible, and he concluded to believe it.

During the morning, while riding upon his high-spirited charger, he recalled to mind Selma as she stood in the garden surrounded by flowers, with that sad though interesting smile upon her beautiful features, and he thought her the fairest creature he had ever beheld. Then again, he resolved that whoever should malign her good name should answer to him for it. He was glad that he had warned Argeneau. He was satisfied with himself that he had interviewed Madame Mortier, and now he believed nothing could possibly occur which might cause his adopted cousin's unhappiness.

Having settled this in his own mind, his thoughts reverted to Argeneau, and he determined as soon as possible to know something of his history. It was while this thought predominated that the accident had occurred, and although his meditation had been suddenly interrupted, and a number of incidents had intervened before its resumption, upon waking, about midnight, he discovered Argeneau still sitting in the room, with an open book in his hand, and his mind at once returned to the interrupted topic.

But his brain was not free from the opiate, and after watching Argeneau a moment, he drifted off into semi-consciousness, and did not again open his eyes until aroused by a low knock upon the door which opened into the corridor.

Argeneau, upon answering the knock, discovered that it was Antoine, the footman, come to announce the arrival of three strange gentlemen.

De Banyan had overheard and was wide awake in an instant.

"Their names!" he cried.

Argeneau was startled at the sound of his master's voice, coming so unexpectedly from behind the curtains of the bed, but answered immediately.

"Major de Brissac, Captain Martello, and Monsieur de Saint-Breton."

"They have come in good time," said de Banyan. "Admit them, Antoine, and, Argeneau, see that they want for nothing."

As Argeneau left the room, de Banyan lay back upon his pillow, and a happy smile lighted up his countenance.

CHAPTER IX.

THREE GENTLEMEN FROM PARIS.

Another morning had come, and still there was a promise of fair weather. The birds sang cheerily in the park and the sun shone so brightly that all nature rejoiced in its effulgence. The same cheerful spirit prevailed within doors. In the breakfast room Major de Brissac, Captain Martello and Monsieur de Saint-Breton were feasting, with considerable satisfaction, upon the delicacies that had been set before them.

M. de Saint-Breton was seated at one end of the table, with the major at his right and the captain at his left. He was a tall, well-built man, with a full, round, jovial face, twinkling eyes, a short, flat nose, brown hair and short side-whiskers; yet, despite his pleasantness, there was that about the mouth and chin which indicated determination and considerable daring. He was attired in a civilian suit of dark material, with jack boots, and would easily have passed for a merchant.

The only change in the appearance of de Brissac and Martello, since their introduction at the *Lien d'Or* Inn, in the Faubourg St. Antoine, was a more contented expression of countenance, which might have been due to their present circumstances, since soldiers who have been ex-

isting on nothing better than bread and water, with only an occasional bottle of wine, will certainly look happier while partaking of the delicacies of a wealthy baron's table, and if our friends appeared amiable, and ate sumptuously, it is not to be wondered at.

There is nothing like a good meal to bring about sociability; but on this occasion there was, for a time, considerable reserve. This, be it known, was due to the fact that the trio were not very well acquainted. That is to say, de Brissac and Martello were somewhat suspicious of de Saint-Breton, and de Saint-Breton was not sure of de Brissac and Martello. They had met upon the road the night before, and although conversant to some extent upon divers topics, very little had been said which would tend to reveal the object of the visit to Chateau Blanc. De Brissac and Martello had overtaken de Saint-Breton, and had made enquiries of him for the chateau, whereupon the stranger had replied that since he was destined to the same place, he would be glad of their company. So while de Brissac and Martello were wondering who the stranger might be, and what his business at the chateau was, de

Saint-Breton in like manner was worrying his brain over de Brissac and Martello.

In their conversation the death of Baron de Banyan, and the arrival of the new heir, had been commented upon, but it was discovered that de Saint-Breton had never met the present Baron de Banyan, although he had known of him as a colonel of chasseurs for some time. Little was learned of each other, aside from the fact that they had left Paris that morning. Even their names were not known until they announced themselves at the chateau. Under these circumstances it was quite natural that a certain amount of reserve should exist; besides, Fouché's spies were so numerous throughout the country, that one knew not whom to trust, and to be suspected of being an agent of the Bonapartists was a matter which often resulted in the arrest and condemnation to death of the suspect; therefore, one could not be too careful in making acquaintances. But after they had been a few moments at breakfast, and had felt the cheering warmth of some rare old Burgundy, there was a disposition to thaw out and become more sociable.

"My faith!" exclaimed de Brissac, as he set down his glass, and smacked his lips with a decisive wag of the head, "but our dear Maurice has inherited some excellent wine along with his patrimony. It does my soul good to sample it. Come now, my friends, fill up your glasses and join me in a toast to the health of Colonel Baron de Banyan."

There was no need of a second invitation, and when the glasses touched the table again the faces of all beamed with satisfaction.

"It is an excellent wine, major, and of an old vintage," remarked de Saint-Breton. "The late baron was partial to the wines of Burgundy, and many a health

have I quaffed with him of this same supply."

"You seem to have known the old baron pretty well?" remarked de Brissac.

"Yes, fairly. I have had business with him."

"Well, if he was as judicious in business as he was clever in selecting his wines, it is safe to surmise that success attended him."

"He was successful beyond a doubt. No man ever had greater luck," said de Saint-Breton.

"Nor did ever a man show greater pluck!" exclaimed de Brissac, warmly.

"I remember him at Leipsic. Quick as lightning, fierce as fire, stolid as a rock. When the Elster bridge was blown up by that confounded fool of a corporal, he rallied his men, and led them to a ford further up the stream; then, while the shot of the enemy fell round him like hail, he got his division across amid the cheers of those who had preceded him. Now, there was a general for you. But, alack-a-day, those times are over now."

"Think you so, major," exclaimed de Saint-Breton, looking up, with elevated eyebrows.

De Brissac exchanged a quick glance with Martello, which signified some doubt concerning the speaker. Martello poured another glass of wine, and appeared indifferent. Then de Brissac put a question which seemed strangely out of place, but which was not without its purpose, nevertheless.

"Can it be, monsieur, that you love the violet?" said he, after sweeping a glance about the room to see that there were no servants present.

"What then?" was the quick reply.

De Brissac and Martello again exchanged glances, with a nod of the head, and an expression of satisfaction.

"It will return in the spring," said they, in concert.

THE LADY OF CHATEAU BLANC.

"So, then, we are of the same party," cried de Saint-Breton. "I thought so. Only Bonapartists come here, and yet it is well to be on guard."

"Then you are here for a purpose, monsieur," said de Brissac.

"Yes; but my mission is a secret one at present; I cannot reveal it even to you," replied de Saint-Breton.

"Well then, what of the times? You must certainly have quite a budget of news?"

De Saint-Breton continued his efforts for a moment upon the wing of a chicken.

"There will be a change soon, my dear major," said he, finally, laying down the remnants of the wing, with an expression of satisfaction. "Yesterday at the review in front of the Tuileries, an incident happened which proves the eagerness of our soldiers to return to the old state of things. I was standing near enough to overhear what I am about to relate, and I know it to be true. As the Duc de Barri passed along the lines, a grenadier called out very lustily, *Vive l'Empereur*. The duke went up to him and said, 'How is it that you are so fond of a man who did not pay you, and who led you, without recompense, from one end of Europe to the other?' The grenadier looked up at the duke with a gloomy air, then dropped his eyes upon his firelock. 'What is it to you?' said he, 'if we choose to give him credit?'"

The major and the captain burst into a hearty laugh.

"That grenadier, monsieur, deserves the cross," cried Martello.

"He is indeed a worthy man," said de Brissac.

"There are more like him, I can assure you," said de Saint-Breton.

"With a few regiments of such fellows, the Emperor would soon regain his power," said Martello.

"Hist! the servant!" exclaimed de Brissac, in a low voice.

After the servant had come and gone, the conversation continued.

"The Emperor should be in Paris now," resumed de Saint-Breton, earnestly.

"Have you not heard, my friends, that they are discussing the advisability of transporting his Majesty to the Azores?"

"No!" exclaimed the major and the captain, in amazement.

"Yes, it is true," replied de Saint-Breton. "To save himself from an ignominious exile, he should leave Elba at once."

"Does he know of this?" asked de Brissac.

"He may by this time. Ten days ago I met M. Dumoulin. He was on his way to Elba, with valuable information for the Emperor. He told me what I have just stated, and also that Dauphine, and Brittany, and even Avignon, the city that was so bitter against His Majesty a year ago, are strongly in his favor. We only await the opportune moment. The enthusiasm in the Emperor's favor has been increased by his humiliation."

"Then in a few months the Emperor will be in Paris!" cried de Brissac. "With the soldiers in his favor, nothing can prevent him. I would advise that gouty old Bourbon to get his chariot ready, for his legs will not carry him out of France fast enough, when once the Emperor shall have landed. So come, my friends, fill up your glasses to the brim. This time we drink to the Emperor."

They rose from their chairs and drained their glasses at a swallow. But just as they were about to resume their seats, the door opened and de Banyan entered, with his bandaged arm in a sling.

"Ah! my dear Maurice," exclaimed de Brissac, springing toward de Banyan, as he caught sight of him. "It seems an age since we parted."

Then seeing that he carried his arm in a sling, he drew back in surprise.

"Why, what devil's luck is this?" he exclaimed, pointing to the arm.

De Banyan closed the door and advanced a few steps toward the table, then stood smiling at his guests.

"Well, you see, my dear Lucien," said he, somewhat jocosely, "I have a horse in the stable that has a fashion of taking the bit in his teeth. Yesterday he bolted with me, dashed in among some trees, brushed me off like a fly, and this is the result."

"Have him shot at once," cried de Brissac, earnestly. "Why, *parbleu*, man, we cannot afford to have you breaking your bones at a time like this. We need you. The Emperor needs you. All France needs you. I take it, my dear Maurice, that you are failing in your horsemanship for want of practice."

"There will be practice enough soon," said Martello, advancing and shaking de Banyan's hand cordially. "It is a lucky thing, Maurice, that it is not your sword arm."

"A very lucky thing, baron," said de Saint-Breton, who had risen and was awaiting his turn. "I have not the honor of knowing you personally, but I hope this will not prevent me expressing my sympathy."

"You are very good, Monsieur de Saint-Breton," said de Banyan, approaching and extending his hand. "Since I was unable to bid you welcome last night, permit me to do so now. Please do me the honor to make yourself perfectly at home, and remember that your smallest wish shall be attended to with pleasure."

"I am very grateful to you, baron," said de Saint-Breton, with a low bow. "Allow me to say that it is the same hospitality which your uncle has always extended to me."

"Then you have been here before, monsieur?"

"Oh, yes, several times. I had considerable business with the late baron. I was here the morning of the day he was stricken, but he was in good health when I last saw him. I left for Paris on a special mission in the interest of Countess de Vilma. It was a great blow to me when I learned of the baron's death."

"I fear his death has seriously inconvenienced the countess. But whatever I can do in his stead, shall be done in as good a spirit," said de Banyan.

"Then we can rely upon you, baron?" said de Saint-Breton.

"To the death," said de Banyan, earnestly.

"Do I understand, Maurice, that Countess de Vilma is here?" exclaimed Martello, in surprise.

"Yes, she is here, but she returns to Elba soon."

"She will begin her journey to-night, baron," said de Saint-Breton. "She was waiting for me to return from Paris. I have been in search of valuable information for the Emperor, and as soon as my despatches are in her possession she will begin her journey."

"Then we start with her," said de Brissac, emphatically. "Since our destination is Elba, she shall not go back alone."

"But is it necessary for her to start to-night?" said de Banyan, regretfully.

"Yes. She must not be seen leaving the chateau," said de Saint-Breton. "It is much safer to start at night. There are spies everywhere. It would be dangerous for you, my dear baron, should it be made known to the authorities that the countess is here. Once on the road, so long as she travels incognito, she can journey night or day in safety."

"She has much need of our protection

then," said Martello. "It was lucky we arrived last night."

"But you, Maurice," said de Brissac, ruefully, "you, with your broken bones, we must leave you behind. *Pardieu!* if my horse ever serves me such a scurvy trick, I shall shoot him without compunction."

"Oh, I shall be ready to join you when the time comes," said de Banyan.

"We count on you, Maurice; but after all, since you have come into your inheritance, perhaps you can do more good here," said de Brissac.

"I shall endeavor to serve the Emperor wherever I am," was de Banyan's reply. Then turning to de Saint-Breton he continued, "You see, I am already at service to the countess and to you, monsieur, in his Majesty's behalf."

"Let me assure you, my dear baron, of my gratitude," said de Saint-Breton.

"Speaking of the countess, my friends," said de Brissac, beginning to fill his glass, "reminds me of the fact that we have

not yet honored her with a toast. The time is not inopportune, and I invite you to join me."

It was surprising how many celebrities the major could think of when there was good wine to be had, and it is hardly necessary to state that his friends were, on this occasion, quite ready to join him. The health of the countess was quaffed in a brimming cup, and after they had toasted all the worthies they could think of, there prevailed a sentiment of congeniality which compensated for the reticence of the evening before.

Finally, breakfast being over, they left the room and set about the occupations of the day. That is to say, de Saint-Breton was left to report to the countess, while de Brissac and Martello, were taken in tow by de Banyan, who, in spite of his broken arm, endeavored to entertain them as best he could. It was quite natural that he should wish to take them over his estate, and during the whole morning they were thus occupied.

CHAPTER X.

THE FINDING OF A TREASURE.

IF the walls of Chateau Blanc could speak, they would tell exciting tales. During that period succeeding the revolution, in which the royalist struggled against republican, and even in the time of the First Council, when measures were adopted for the destruction of all factions of a bandit nature, these same battlemented walls bore the appellation of Chateau Noir, and gave shelter to a band of desperadoes, who, as an excuse for their lawlessness, had espoused the cause of the royalist party. Their leader, a dare-devil by nature, and a bandit through force of circumstances, bore the name and title of Marquis de Trépeson. He was of the old nobility, and through his cunning and daring had escaped the Conciergerie and the guillotine, and drawing about him a malicious band of Chouans, had so securely established himself in his chateau, that he was not dislodged until near the close of the period of the First Council. Even then, despite the fact that several detachments had been sent against him, the intrepid marquis continued to bid defiance to the laws of the land, until General de Banyan, who was then a major, succeeded in capturing him, and in breaking up his band of Chouans.

As a reward for his services, the First Council promoted the major to the rank of colonel, and gave him the entire estate, which had been confiscated by the government. The late baron had made good use of the gift, and at the time his

nephew became his successor, there was only a suggestion of the original Chateau Noir left. This suggestion, however, was more noticeable internally than externally. There were secret doors and passages to many of the apartments, and in several instances either a large mirror or painting, arranged with a secret spring, hid places of exit never dreamed of.

It was while showing his friends over the chateau, that de Banyan discovered several of these secret doors and passages. Argeneau, who had been taken along to serve as a guide, had, with his usual readiness, related several tales in connection with them, more or less legendary, and as he conducted the party here and there, he was gratified to see that his narratives were received with considerable interest. It was after luncheon, and de Saint-Breton had joined them.

They had been over nearly the whole building, when they finally reached an apartment, to which they did not gain immediate admittance. The door was locked, and Argeneau had some difficulty in finding the key.

"Do you know what is beyond?" said de Banyan to Argeneau, who was working diligently at the lock.

"No, monsieur," replied Argeneau, "I do not know that this door has been opened since I came to live here. The late baron never entered this part of the chateau, and it has been left as it was in the time of the marquis."

THE LADY OF CHATEAU BLANC.

"I was in hopes you knew all about it. My curiosity is quite aroused," said de Banyan.

"They say that every household has its skeleton," remarked de Brissac. "Your household, Maurice, may not be an exception to the rule. Perhaps this is where they keep those awful bones."

"That is not unlikely," remarked de Saint-Breton, with a smile.

At this moment the lock yielded to Argeneau's efforts, and the door swung open with a loud creaking of its rusty hinges. As the party entered, they were surprised at what they beheld.

It was a small room, with polished oak floor, deep oak wainscoting, pannelled walls and ceiling. There was an open fire-place, but no windows, the light being admitted through a large skylight overhead. In each corner stood a large candelabra of twelve candles. There were old time pictures of hunting scenes upon the walls, and over the mantel, the head and antlers of a large deer. There were also two well-filled book-cases. The furniture was of heavy, carved oak, and of a very old pattern. In the centre of the room was an oaken table, such as were used in the eighteenth century for writing purposes. It was covered with dust, and so was everything else in the room.

"This must have served as a library, or study," observed de Brissac, as he surveyed the room with a sweeping glance.

"Well, if it was, the old marquis evidently did not intend that he should be caught in it, like a rat in a trap, for he has provided his usual means of exit," said Martello, advancing to a life-size picture of a warrior in armour, which was fixed close to the wall opposite the fire-place.

The others immediately became interested in the picture.

De Brissac was looking for the secret spring, when suddenly he cried:

"*Parbleu!* what have we here?"

He was examining something in the gilded frame. The others gathered round him.

"By my faith, it is a bullet, or I never knew the mark one leaves," said he, after a closer inspection. "It has been shot into the frame by some one standing near the fire-place."

"That is quite evident," said de Banyan, "and if I am not mistaken, that small, dark streak running down from the hole is blood. Look here."

As he spoke, he pointed to a large black stain on the floor, about half way between the table and the wall. They looked at it earnestly. Martello brushed the dust away with his handkerchief. De Brissac scraped at it with his foot. Some of the stain scaled off.

"Blood, by my faith," exclaimed de Brissac. "The bullet has gone through some one."

De Saint-Breton straightened himself and swept a glance about the room, then, with his hands behind him, stepped towards the table, in a meditative mood. De Banyan, whose arm was giving considerable pain, brushed the dust off one of the chairs, and seated himself a short distance from the table.

"It is too bad, Argeneau, that you do not know the story connected with this room," said de Banyan. "I am sure it would be interesting."

"I am very sorry, monsieur, that I do not know it," said Argeneau. "I should like to tell it."

"Perhaps, my dear baron, I could tell you something about it," said de Saint-Breton, taking a pinch of snuff from his tortoise-shell box.

"You, monsieur?" exclaimed de Banyan, in surprise.

"Yes; why not?"

Every one was surprised and no less attentive.

"Then I beg of you, monsieur, to proceed. You see how anxious we are," said de Banyan.

"Very well; I will do my best. But, gentlemen, you must not expect too much."

In a moment they had gathered around de Saint-Breton, and with almost the eagerness of children awaited the story.

"It is not a long story, gentlemen," said de Saint-Breton, "and as I am not blessed with the descriptive ability of our worthy friend, Argeneau, I shall state it as briefly as possible. In the year 1803 I was a lieutenant under the late Baron de Banyan, who was then a major. I was with him when he captured the Marquis de Trépeson. We had a hard fight before we gained possession of the chateau, and many of our men were killed. But we had a strong force, and were determined to succeed. Our men were so furious, that upon gaining an entrance, they ransacked the building and killed a good many who were hiding in the different apartments. In the corridors there was a perfect *melée*, in the midst of which I discovered a man, whom I knew to be in the employ of Fouché, as a government spy. He was fighting with our enemies, and I knew then that he had been doing the double service of a traitor. He had used his connection with the Minister of Police to further the cause of the royalists, and in this way had managed to keep the Marquis de Trépeson and his band of desperadoes posted. His name was Benedict Bellefontaine."

As de Saint-Breton uttered the name, Argeneau started, and his face became as pale as death. No one noticed it, however, and de Saint-Breton continued.

"I singled out the man. He fled to this room. As he was about to open

that secret door, I fired my pistol at him, and the ball passed through his head. He fell there, where you see that stain upon the floor. I presume that is the bullet in the picture frame."

As he finished, de Saint-Breton coolly helped himself to another pinch of snuff.

Strange to say, Argeneau was so agitated that de Bayan asked him what was the matter.

"It is nothing, monsieur. Simply one of my old attacks, which often comes on during an exciting moment. I cannot listen to the story of bloodshed without becoming excited."

"You would never make a soldier, Argeneau," said de Brissac, derisively. "You are too sensitive."

"Indeed, I fear I am, monsieur. I was never cut out for a soldier."

But nothing more was thought of Argeneau than that he was of a very timid nature. True, his actions were quite unusual, but when these robust and hardy soldiers had taken into consideration his slight, nervous body, they thought that perhaps his sensitiveness was quite natural, and they dismissed the subject without further comment.

The story of the room with its secret door still interested them, and de Saint-Breton appeared in another character. That he had been a soldier aroused a feeling of sympathy which was common to all. That he had participated in the overthrow of the Marquis de Trépeson and his band made him more interesting than ever, and from that moment they regarded him as a man of considerable importance. For a few minutes Martello had been contemplating the secret door. Finally he rose from his chair, and stepping to the picture, began to examine it, not only with his eyes, but with his hands.

"There should be a spring here somewhere," said he.

The others drew about him, and began to search for the spring.

While this was going on, Argeneau stepped to de Banyan's side and asked that he might be excused, stating that he had not finished certain work which required his attention. De Banyan, seeing that they would not require him longer, permitted him to go.

Meanwhile, the spring had been found, and amid exclamations of satisfaction the door swung open.

Instead of a passage-way, as they expected, they found an alcove, or rather, a closet. In this were arranged a number of shelves, and on these shelves were a number of well-filled bags. De Brissac took one of these down. It was very heavy, and when he dropped it upon the floor there was a jingle of coin. When he opened it, a glittering mass of gold met his gaze.

With an exclamation of surprise they gathered around de Brissac; then de Banyan took the bag and emptied it upon the table. Martello stepped to the door leading to the corridor, closed it and

locked it, then returned to the table. In a very short time twenty bags had been emptied upon the table, and in the glittering mass of gold, there was over one hundred thousand francs. Who could tell how it came there. But everyone guessed that it had been the marquis' treasure.

"My friends," said de Banyan, after they had counted the money, "we are all in the same cause. We are each of us devoted to the Emperor. The Emperor is in need of money. His cause cannot live without money. My plan is this, Monsieur de Saint-Breton shall take this money to the Emperor, for immediate use. It has, no doubt, been stolen from the government, by the marquis and his band, and to the government it shall return. What say you, my friends, to my plan?"

The plan was at once agreed upon, and when night came, the gold was packed away in Countess de Vilma's carriage, and started on its journey to the Emperor.

CHAPTER XI.

A SQUAD OF HUSSARS CAME OUT OF THE NIGHT.



IN the interview between Countess de Vilma and M. de Saint-Breton, the countess learned so much of the true state of affairs in Paris, that she took de Saint-Breton's advice to start for Elba that very night, with a budget of information which would certainly be of great value to the Emperor. After dismissing de Saint-Breton, she informed her maid of her intentions, and instructed her to get things ready for the start. Then she sought Selma's boudoir with the hope of spending the rest of the day with her.

In the evening the ladies and the gentlemen met in the elegant drawing-room of the chateau. Selma had her harp and lute brought in, and for a time entertained them with selections from Haydn's "Creation," which was then fast becoming popular. She had a sweet soprano voice, and when she sang with lute accompaniment, "With Verdure Clad," every one was delighted. Finally, resuming her harp she several selections from Méhul's "Gabrielle d'Estrées," and Spontini's "La Vestale," charming her little audience to the fullest extent; so with music, cards and congenial conversation the evening passed quickly.

The parting hour came finally, and as Countess de Vilma's travelling carriage

rolled away, Selma burst into tears and hurried to her room. Madame Mortier was there to console her, however, and for some time they sat together commenting upon the events of the past week, and what they expected of the future. Finally, Madame Mortier bade Selma good-night and left the room.

For some time Selma sat at her window, looking out into the night. The sky was clear and the stars were grand to contemplate. The moon had not yet risen, but away in the distance there was a glow among the trees which heralded her advent. Deep, fantastic shadows lined the roadway, and a gentle breeze whispered among the trees. There was no other sound save the chirping of insects, the croaking of frogs, and the fluting of a nightingale from a hedge in the park.

Presently, however, another sound became noticeable; indistinct at first, then gradually more definite. Selma listened attentively and wondered if it could be the countess returning, but as the sound was finally located in an opposite direction, her anxiety was immediately changed from the countess to what promised to be a coming event. It was not long before she could distinguish the sound of galloping horses, and as they drew nearer, the cadence of rapid hoof beats could be easily followed.

Suddenly, from a bend in the road, two horsemen dashed into view. In spite of

the darkness, there was no trouble to discern that they were hussars. They rode side by side, and moved at a rapid pace. In another moment two others appeared, and together they rode as if much depended upon their speed. Selma listened eagerly. Presently, although the trees and the night had for a time obscured them, she was aware they had halted at the park gate. Then she realized that they were galloping up the avenue. She could hear the scraping of gravel under foot, the clanking of sabres, the rattling of bridle chains, the squeaking of leather, the sound of heavy breathing. In another moment they were at the foot of the staircase.

There was a stamping and scraping of gravel as the horses were brought to a stand, then all was still, save the clamping of bits, and the heavy breathing of the panting animals.

Selma looked out very cautiously, her heart was throbbing wildly. The horses had evidently travelled fast; they were reeking with sweat, and their nostrils were widely distended.

One man, who bore three chevrons upon his arm, dismounted, threw his bridle to his comrade, gathered up his sabre and sabre-tache, then with an erect bearing and a brisk step climbed the staircase.

The door opened before he had time to rap.

"You have come too late. Your bird has flown," exclaimed an irritated voice.

Selma was electrified. The voice was Argeneau's. Why should he have opened the door? Why not Antoine, the footman? She was just above them and could hear distinctly. She listened eagerly.

"The devil!" exclaimed the hussar.

"You may well say the devil," retorted Argeneau, angrily. "You have had

plenty of time. You knew of this affair three hours ago."

"We started an hour ago. We have been riding ever since," replied the hussar. "Besides, you did not tell us he would leave to-night."

"Well, there is time yet. You can overtake him. His route lies to the south. I would advise you to follow at once. But have a care; he is well-armed and well-mounted. Besides, there are two others with him."

"Keep your warning for those who need it," replied the gruff voice of the hussar.

Then turning upon his heel, he descended the steps and mounted his horse. There was a trampling of feet in the gravel, then the horses were put to a gallop. In another moment the door closed and all was still, save the insects, the frogs and the nightingale in the park. Selma was left to her reflections. One question continually presented itself:

"Was Argeneau a spy, a traitor, or a scoundrel?"

Meanwhile the countess and her friends were well on their way. Nothing had happened to alarm them, yet they were alert and uneasy. There was a distance of a quarter of a league between her carriage and de Brissac and Martello. This arrangement was to serve as a blind. Since Countess de Vilma was travelling incognito, to be apparently without an escort would certainly attract very little attention. M. de Saint-Breton was more than a league in advance, for the purpose of arranging for relays of horses. If they could pass the first post station without being recognized, the danger would be over. They were congratulating themselves upon the way in which things had turned out, and yet were entertaining no little anxiety over what might still possibly happen. The recognition of the countess would

prove fatal to the enterprise. Her presence in France would certainly give rise to alarm among the royalists, who believed her to be at Elba with her husband. The consequences might be her arrest, and an exposure of the whole scheme to bring the Emperor back. Even as it was, all who ever had anything to do with Napoleon and his empire were looked upon with suspicion, and even the Queen of Holland, or rather the Duchess de St. Leu, who was permitted to reside in Paris, did not escape the vigilance of the police. Therefore, precaution was not altogether unnecessary. The experience which de Brissac and Martello had had, in dodging the spies of Paris, was another reason for uneasiness, and they believed that it was even more urgent than ever that they should leave France as soon as possible.

They had been discussing these matters as they rode along, when suddenly de Brissac reined in his horse, and turned half way round in his saddle.

"Well, what is the matter now?" exclaimed Martello, as he followed de Brissac's example.

"Listen! Do you not hear something down there?"

They had just climbed a short hill, which, at its summit, formed a complete bend in the road. For about three minutes they did not move.

"No," said Martello. "I hear nothing; do you?"

"Not now. I thought I did though. Ah! there it is again. Do you hear that?"

"Yes. Do you make it out?"

De Brissac hurriedly dismounted, and dropping upon his hands and knees, placed his ear to the ground.

"Well?" said Martello, after waiting several seconds.

"Its horses, by the eternal!" cried de

Brissac, springing to his feet, and then into his saddle. "Devil take it, we are pursued."

"Humph! that is rather unpleasant. But what makes you think we are pursued?" remarked Martello.

De Brissac listened before he answered. The sounds had become more distinct.

"They are moving too fast for ordinary travel," said he finally.

"*Parbleu!*" exclaimed Martello. "Then we are likely to have an interesting time pretty soon, if that is the case."

He bent over his saddle, and began unfastening the buckles of his pistol holsters. Then he drew his sabre partly from its scabbard and returned it, to satisfy himself that it was ready for the emergency. De Brissac did likewise.

"We must intercept them," said he. "They must never overtake the countess."

"But if we are outnumbered, our chances will not be worth much," said Martello.

"Devil take the chances. We must fight and take the consequences."

"But we must succeed in putting them to route, or it will be all up with the countess."

De Brissac looked about him rather anxiously. They had just reached an open space in the road, and there was a heavy clump of trees a little further beyond them.

"Do you know this locality?" said de Brissac, finally.

"I have been over it before," answered Martello.

"Is there a cross road anywhere near?"

"There is one about a league further on."

"Ah! that is good. Now let us reach that clump of trees before they discover us."

The next moment they were flying to cover.

On reaching the shadow of the trees, de Brissac took up a position on one side of the road and Martello on the other. Both drew their pistols, and awaited further developments.

Meanwhile, the sounds which first attracted their attention grew louder. Presently there appeared above the summit of the hill the shako of an hussar, then the head and shoulders, then a horse's head, and finally the full form of a splendid looking warrior, upon a jaded charger. Behind him, in quick succession, appeared three others. Upon gaining the summit they put spurs to their horses, and came on at a gallop.

"Fire at their horses," said de Brissac. "It would be a pity to kill such fine looking soldiers."

"Rot the soldiers," exclaimed Martello, "since the odds are against us, my dear Lucien, I shall endeavor to pop that big sergeant out of his saddle. One man less will be something to our advantage."

"Very well, pop him if you can; but leave that burly chap to the right for me."

In less time than it takes to tell it, four pistol shots rang out in quick succession, and two of the hussars fell from their saddles.

Believing that two bullets had missed their mark, de Brissac and Martello immediately returned their pistols to their holsters, drew their sabres, put spurs to their horses and dashed out into the moonlight.

The fall of their comrades had thrown the remaining hussars into confusion. Their horses were brought suddenly to a halt. They waited only long enough to discover that some horsemen were bearing down upon them with sabres drawn, then putting spurs to their own chargers, galloped away in the direction in which

they had come, much to the amusement of de Brissac and Martello.

Upon reaching the incline, the retreating hussars dashed down it at break-neck speed. De Brissac and Martello halted at the summit, wheeled their horses and galloped leisurely back. As they approached the two fallen hussars they discovered that the big sergeant was sitting upon the side of the road with his elbows upon his knees and his head in his hands.

"Ah, see there, Louis," exclaimed de Brissac, "you have only winged him."

"I am glad I did not kill him. These fine fellows will be needed soon."

"Well, if they run from the enemy like that, they will be of no use whatever. At any rate I hope my man is in a no worse condition than yours. But he lies there as if something serious had occurred. I did not aim at him, I shot at his horse, and you will perceive that my aim was correct, for the poor brute has fallen."

Sure enough, a dead horse was lying a short distance from the insensible hussar. A little further on, at the side of the road, the horse of the other hussar was quietly grazing.

As de Brissac and Martello approached the discomfited sergeant, he looked up with hatred in his eyes, but the expression upon the faces of the two friends, as they reined in their horses, was that of sympathy.

"Are you badly hurt?" said de Brissac.

"I can take care of myself," was the gruff reply.

"And your comrade?" said Martello.

"It's all up with him. His neck is broken."

"Damnation!" exclaimed de Brissac.

Then, without anything further, they put spurs to their horses and were soon out of sight in the distance.

CHAPTER XII.

A MORNING DRIVE.



WHEN morning came, De Banyan arose at a rather late hour, and with the assistance of his *valet de chambre*, dressed himself and made ready for breakfast. His fractured arm troubled him somewhat, but since he had sustained a number of worse wounds on the field of battle, and had recovered from them with only the comparatively indifferent attention of the army surgeons, he believed that a broken arm was in no wise sufficient in itself to deprive him of the usual enjoyments of life, and among other things, he looked forward to his cousin Selma's society with very pleasant anticipations.

The evening before, she had treated him with marked deference. Indeed, she had shown such solicitude since his mishap, that if he dreamed of her, it is not surprising. She was so beautiful, so amiable, so interesting, that many a less susceptible man than he could not have resisted the charm of her presence. He had hoped to meet her at breakfast, and sure enough, when he entered the room, he found her there, apparently waiting for him.

"I must apologize for having kept you waiting," said he. "I think I must have overslept. I hope you are not out of patience."

She smiled pleasantly and moved toward him.

"Your broken arm excuses you. I am not out of patience, but am glad that you are able to be about."

"You are very lenient."

"Oh no, I think not."

"A soldier should not consider a broken arm a sufficient excuse for keeping breakfast waiting."

"You speak lightly of it, Maurice. I am sure if it were me, I should not be able to leave my bed, much less my room."

"Soldiers are accustomed to even worse wounds than broken bones. Many a poor fellow is forced to march long distances in spite of his sufferings."

"It must be terrible."

"It does seem terrible to those who are unaccustomed to it. But we think very little of it. It is a part of our profession to give and receive wounds."

"A man must be brave to do that."

"It is not so much a matter of bravery, as it is a matter of saving one's self from the hands of the enemy."

"But do you not rejoice that peace has been declared? I cannot understand how men can talk of war after their awful experiences on the fields of battle."

"I do rejoice, but I know full well that we shall have more war before France is permitted to rest. Men do not think of their experiences when there is an object in view. Let them once establish an object, and everything is forgotten save the hope of success."

They had seated themselves at the table

and the waiting maid had begun to serve them.

"But why should there be more war?" said Selma.

"The reason is good enough, mademoiselle. The Allies have forced us to accept a Bourbon king. We do not want the Bourbons. France declared this twenty years ago, when she dethroned and guillotined King Louis and Madame Veto. But England, and Russia, and Prussia, and Austria, or, as the king would say, our good friends the Allies, insist that we do not know our own minds, or our own requirements, consequently, there is prevalent a spirit of rebellion. We insist upon our rights. We demand our Emperor."

"Then there is likely to be a civil war?"

"Possibly so."

"But have not many of Napoleon's old marshals allied themselves to the King?"

"Yes, but they will fly to the Emperor's standard the moment he lands in France."

"Would that not be treasonable?"

"It would be treasonable to the Bourbons, but loyal to France."

"Then suppose Napoleon should fail to regain France; suppose, after a desperate effort, perhaps a civil war, the Emperor should fail to reinstate himself; suppose the King should succeed in maintaining his power, would it not be terrible to all who deserted the Bourbons?"

"But the Emperor will not fail. All France is eager for his return. Thousands are expecting him, and they will rally to his standard as they never have before."

"Oh dear, I fear I do not know enough of politics to understand you, my cousin. Still, it seems to me that if war can be prevented it should. France has suffered so. Besides, I cannot bear to think of you going——"

At this juncture Antoine entered and made his obeisance.

"You sent for me, mademoiselle?" said he.

"Yes, Antoine. I wish you to order my carriage. I am going to see Madame Duval. I want you to place in the carriage the things which Julie will give you. Have the carriage ready in an hour's time. That is all, Antoine."

With another obeisance, Antoine left the room.

"And who is Madame Duval, may I ask?" said de Banyan.

"She is a widow whose husband was killed at La Rothière. She is a tenant of ours, and is almost destitute. I have not seen her since a week before poor papa died. I fear she is not very comfortable."

"So you are going to assume the role of sister of charity? Will you permit me to accompany you?"

"I shall be glad of your company, Maurice."

They finished their breakfast finally and a little later were ready for what promised to be a pleasant drive.

As he caught sight of the carriage at the foot of the staircase, de Banyan, with a curiosity not unnatural in one who has just come into an inheritance, and who wishes to get a full knowledge of everything that may be considered his own, contemplated it for a moment with no little satisfaction. It was what they termed in those days a *gondola caleche*, and was drawn by two fine bays, one of which was ridden by the postillion. The footman rode on a seat at the front of the carriage.

While de Banyan was surveying the equipage, he saw that the postillion was examining the priming of a pistol which he had taken from the holsters of his saddle.

"Do you usually go out under arms,

mademoiselle," he asked, as he helped Selma to the back seat.

"Oh, yes. Papa always insisted upon me doing so whenever I went out alone. There have been a number of highway robberies about here, and it is always wise to be ready for any emergency. Antoine is armed with two pistols and so is the postillion. No one ever molested me, however, but papa always insisted upon what you see, and I must say that I feel much safer under such circumstances. One never knows what may happen."

"My uncle was very precautions," remarked de Banyan, as he took his seat, and gave the signal to start.

"Yes. He never forgot that he was a soldier."

"Then you do not dread the sound of firearms, or the smell of powder?"

"Oh yes, I do. But sometimes we must set aside our feelings for what is necessary for our safety."

"But you have no fear of anything happening to-day have you?"

"Oh, no indeed. Why?"

De Banyan could not help admiring the beautiful girl, whose face was so fresh from the delightful morning air, and whose deep blue eyes were so kindly and frank.

"Because if anything should happen, my dear Selma, please remember that my life is at your service."

She looked at him with an expression of gratitude. Then a blush suffused her face, and she seemed a little confused. But recovering herself, she said laughingly:

"Thank you, my brave protector, but I am almost certain that you will not be called upon to make such a sacrifice this morning."

"If there is ever a time, Selma, when I can serve you in such a manner, you will not find me hesitating."

"Oh, but you must not do anything

so rash as that, Maurice. I want you to live."

"Still, you know that I am your protector, your guardian. Please tell me that you do not regret it."

"I shall never regret it, Maurice."

"You may find me a little strange in my ways. I have been very little in the society of ladies. My mother died a good many years ago, and I never had a sister. I have always wished I had a sister, I think she would have made a better man of me."

"Then you must let me be your sister."

"To make a better man of me?"

They both laughed.

"Oh, I did not mean that," said she, merrily, "but since you suggest it, I believe I should like to try it."

"Then you think there is room for improvement?"

"Have you not admitted it? You have already said that I may find you strange, and that you are unaccustomed to the society of ladies. Now it will be such fun to teach a big brave soldier, who has faced death in a hundred forms, the little niceties which are expected of him by the fair sex."

They were both amused, and chatting thus, rode along very pleasantly. Finally, however, Selma became preoccupied.

Her thoughts were of Argeneau. It seemed strange that since the affair in the summer house she had seen nothing of him. Hitherto, he had made himself very conspicuous. He had even annoyed her at times, although she did not understand his meaning. But had it not been for the incident of the night before, she might have believed that he had left the château.

All night she had wondered at his conduct, and had come to the conclusion that something unusual was going on. She worried a little about the countess and

her friends, and tried to account for the visit of the hussars and Argeneau's connection with them. She wondered if de Banyan knew anything about the affair. She wondered if she should tell him. Yet she hesitated through fear of doing Argeneau an injustice.

"Why so thoughtful, cousin Selma," said de Banyan, presently.

"I ask your pardon," said she, arousing herself. "I was thinking of an incident that occurred last night."

And then she told him what she had seen and heard.

It is hardly necessary to state that de Banyan was incensed at what seemed to be Argeneau's treachery. He was deeply concerned about the safety of his friends, and if the subject became the topic of conversation, it was only a natural sequence. In due time, however, they arrived at their destination.

Madame Duval's cottage stood by the roadside, and although an humble affair, it was nevertheless cleanly, suggesting the carefulness of its occupant.

Madame's husband, Pierre Duval, had been an industrious peasant until the Emperor's last conscription tore him from his family, and compelled him to do battle against the enemies of France. At La Rothière his career was suddenly terminated by a Prussian bullet, and those dependent upon him were left without a protector.

Selma had been very kind to his family, which consisted of the widow, two children, and an aged father, and out of her own purse had provided many of the necessities of life.

When de Banyan understood the matter, his heart was touched, and following out an impulse, he placed in the hands of Madame Duval a purse containing a hundred francs in gold. It was an act that won a smile of approval from Selma, and

afforded Madame Duval and her household unbounded satisfaction.

"It was good of you, Maurice," said Selma, on their way home, and she was glad in her heart that he was generous.

"They have made a sacrifice on the altar of our country," replied de Banyan, with feeling. "There is not a man in France not under obligations to them. I shall not forget them."

"Oh, if there were more who thought so, how many might be in some way compensated for the sacrifices they have made."

"The Emperor has compensated many."

"But they have proven ungrateful. Think of Talleyrand, Fouché, Bernadotte, Marmont, and many of his marshals and generals who deserted him at the critical moment."

"True, but the efforts of these men were for their own personal gains, they made no sacrifices to the Emperor. There are others who have received fewer benefits and are truer men."

"Then if he should return he will have these men to depend upon."

"Oh, as to that, the ministers, marshals and generals will adopt his colors the moment those of the Bourbons lose their significance. It will be another case of the lion and the jackal."

"Do you think this will be soon?"

"It will be with the return of the violet."

De Banyan did not soon forget this visit to Madame Duval's. As they drove home he recalled a picture which reminded him of the Madonna. It was this: An humble apartment, with Selma, in all her youth and beauty, standing near the doorway, holding in her arms a flax-haired cherub of two years, whose infantine demonstrations of delight were highly amusing; a little girl of five summers

tugging in a familiar manner at her skirt; an aged man, the father-in-law of Madame Duval, kneeling and kissing Selma's hand, and Madame Duval, in no wise an uncomely matron, standing near with the sunshine of approval in her smiling countenance.

Had he been an artist, de Banyan would have reproduced that picture, and he would probably have named it the Angel of Mercy.

In this visit Selma had impressed him so that he began to think of her in a way conducive to something beyond admiration, and the prospect of her someday becoming the Baroness de Banyan was very favorable indeed, that is, so far as he was concerned.

His pulses were throbbing with the pleasure of being near her, and if he took no note of his surroundings, it was because his thoughts of her had their own piquancy.

Suddenly, however, upon turning a bend in the road, Selma grasped his arm, and pointed to the distance.

"Look there!" she cried, all in a tremor.

De Banyan looked to discover three masked horsemen approaching at a gallop.

"What does it mean, Antoine?" said de Banyan, turning to the footman.

"Danger, monsieur," was the reply.

"Bandits?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Have you the pistols ready?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Do not use them unless it is absolutely necessary. Are you a good shot?"

"I have been considered so. I was at Leipsic with the late baron."

"If you shoot, do not waste your ammunition."

"Have no fear of that, monsieur."

"How many are there?"

"Three, monsieur."

"We are as good as four. Give me one of the pistols."

Antoine did so, but with some reluctance. He felt that Monsieur le Baron, being disabled, should leave the matter to himself and the postillion.

De Banyan gave his attention to Selma. She was pale, but she gave evidence that she would brave the affair through.

"You are not afraid?" said de Banyan, with a show of anxiety.

"A little," she admitted, "but I shall try to prove that I am the daughter of a soldier."

The next moment the horsemen were alongside. One of them, who seemed to be the leader of the party, came close up to the carriage.

"If you do as I say, monsieur," said he, in a sharp voice that did not seem natural, "no harm will come of this interruption. If you resist, it will be the worse for you. I will trouble you to alight from the carriage."

"And if I refuse?" said de Banyan, with rising ire.

"Then, monsieur, I command you to alight."

The bandit leveled a pistol at de Banyan's head. Selma was almost paralyzed with horror, but before de Banyan could comply, had he been so disposed, a pistol shot rang out with a startling crash, and with a fierce cry the bandit threw up his arms and fell to the ground. Antoine had not lost a moment, but seeing the danger which threatened his master, had fired deliberately at the bandit's head. Two other shots followed in quick succession, but the bandits, evidently not having expected resistance, were so taken by surprise when Antoine and the postillion opened fire upon them, that, being suddenly seized with a sense of self-preservation, they put spurs to their horses and rode rapidly away, leaving their comrade behind:

The man lay near the carriage where he had fallen. The mask had slipped from his face. A bullet had penetrated his forehead, and a thick stream of blood was welling from the wound and staining the dust of the highway. Amid a whirl of emotion de Banyan discovered that the dead man was Argeneau. Selma discovered it also, and sank back into her seat with pale face and quivering nerves.

"Oh, it is awful," she gasped.

"It is no more than he deserves," exclaimed de Banyan, vindictively.

"But I could not wish him such a fate."

"There can be no sympathy for a traitor."

"He has done wrong, Maurice, I pity him."

"He is unworthy of your pity, Selma. From what I now know, he had it in his power to make your life miserable."

She thought he referred to Argeneau's passion for her. She did not know that de Banyan had in his mind Argeneau's

insinuations concerning her origin, therefore, she wondered how it was possible for Argeneau to cause her anything worse than annoyance.

De Banyan believed that the secret he so dreaded to have made known would now remain forever silent, and if he felt a great relief over what had happened, it was because he had already succumbed to Selma's charms, and was beginning to worship at her shrine.

"Shall we drive on, monsieur?" asked Antoine.

"Yes."

Antoine looked at the dead man.

"And shall we do nothing with him, monsieur?"

"No, nothing. Leave him there. His companions will take care of him. He deserves nothing from us. Start the carriage."

In a short time they arrived at the chateau, and Selma in her own boudoir related to Julie and Madame Mortier what had happened.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SECRETARY SHOWS HIS HAND.

When Argeneau left the room in which de Banyan and his friends had made the discovery of the Marquis de Trépeson's treasure, he walked straight to the stables, ordered a horse, mounted and rode away at a brisk gallop.

The expression of his face was not what might have been expected after the weakness shown while de Saint-Breton was relating his story. There was anything but weakness now. The dark frown, the close-set jaw, and the snapping restlessness of the eyes, gave a sinister expression which would have surprised de Banyan and his friends, had they observed him. That he was deeply in earnest about something could also have been inferred from the unkindly manner in which

he urged his horse to a higher rate of speed. At each prick of the spurs the poor beast sprang forward with a snort, and a vigorous switching of the tail, as if angered at the injustice of such treatment, but, nevertheless, he carried his rider rapidly out of sight of the chateau, down dale and up hill, until he came to a beaten path which left the highway at right angles, and meandered through a strip of wood to the west. Here he was permitted to come to a brisk walk, and in compliance with the pressure of the reins, turned into the path.

It was comforting to be in the shadow of the wood; to hear the birds sing, and feel that deep sense of solitude which prevails nowhere else, and which brings to

the troubled mind a sense of rest that cannot be resisted. This was perhaps thereason Argeneau condescended to let his horse move more slowly, or it may have been due to the necessity of frequently having to dodge the drooping branches of the adjacent trees. Be this as it may, however, in half an hour he drew rein at the edge of a small clearing and sounded a cry which resembled the screeching of an owl.

There was an answering cry, and a moment later a man with a large slouch hat, and the garb of a peasant appeared in the clearing and came toward him.

"Ah, Bellefontaine, it is you," said the man, as he reached Argeneau's side. "What's in the wind, that you come so unexpectedly?"

"The devil's in the wind, Lepage," replied Argeneau, with asperity. "Where's Dubosc?"

"In the cave."

"Alone?"

"No. Benoit and Gaspard are there."

"So much the better. Here, take my horse. Keep him here. I shall not be long. I must hurry back."

"What's up?" said Lepage, as Argeneau dismounted.

"There's a job for some of you," said Argeneau.

"Anything easy?"

"No. It's risky business."

"So much the better."

"I can depend on you?"

"Why, certainly, Bellefontaine. You'll not find me shirking a hard job."

"All right. I'll go in now."

Argeneau started across the clearing.

"Oh, I say," cried Lepage, as if a sudden thought had occurred to him.

"Well?" said Argeneau, pausing and half turning.

"Dubosc is in a bad mood."

"The devil he is. What's the matter with him?"

"Oh, they've been quarrelling again."

"Damn those fellows, they are always quarrelling. If they don't stop it I shall cut with them."

"Tell them so."

"I will. What's the matter this time?"

"Cards."

"The last time it was booty."

"Yes, it's always one or the other."

"They are a set of fools."

"Tell them so."

"Perhaps I shall."

The man laughed, and then gave his attention to the horse.

Argeneau crossed the clearing, pulled aside some bushes, and entering the mouth of the cave, traversed a narrow passage until he came to a large subterranean vault. Candles stuck into bottles, and placed on the shelving rocks of the walls transmitted just sufficient light for him to discover two men seated at a rudely improvised table, engaged in a game of cards. A third man, a little apart from the others was cleaning a pistol.

They had heard the sound of Argeneau's approach, and were looking at the entrance of the cave when he made his appearance.

"It is Bellefontaine," exclaimed the man with the pistol.

"Is that you, Benoit?" said Argeneau, for the light blinded him a little.

"Yes."

"Where is Dubosc?"

"*Parbleu!*" exclaimed a gruff voice.

"Where are your eyes?"

"I have bat's eyes just at present, Monsieur le Terror," retorted Argeneau.

"Your illumination has blinded me."

"Well, here I am; so out with it. What's up?"

"Anything on hand for to-night?"

"No, nothing in particular. You have not given us many pointers lately. I guess the lady of Chateau Blanc has suc-

ceeded in turning your head. We began to believe you had deserted us."

"Have no fear of that. I still have need of you, my friends."

"Humph! and when you have no need of us, you will throw us over and denounce us. Is that your game?"

"Come now, Dubosc, you and your band have nothing to fear from me."

"Well, perhaps not. But we know a thing or two when we do fear you. The memory of your father would not save you then."

"It is the memory of my father that brings me here now."

"Well, that's different. A splendid fellow was Benedict Bellefontaine, and it's a mortal shame that he came to his death over there in the old chateau. I often wish I knew who did it. I should have my revenge on him, that's what I would."

"Supposing you had the opportunity to take the man who did it from the chateau within an hour, what would you do?"

"What would I do?"

"Yes. What would you do?"

"Well, damme, I'd find a means to secure him first, then I'd bring him here and hang him to one of those trees outside for the crows to peck at. Oh, I'd have my revenge all right enough, you can wager your boots on that, my boy."

"Well, it is possible for you to have your revenge, Dubosc."

"How so?"

"The man who shot my father is there at the chateau this very moment. You know him. He is de Saint-Breton. Less than an hour ago I heard him tell his friends that he did it. I came away immediately to tell you about it, and to see if we cannot arrange some plan for his capture."

"So it's de Saint-Breton, is it? Well, now, that's not so bad. I've sworn to get even with him on another score. It

was him as shot me in the arm in that last mail coach affair of ours. Now I can have double vengeance. Damme, that's not so bad."

"Well, have you a plan of attack?"

"No, not at present, have you?"

"Yes."

"Out with it then. Let's see if it is a good one."

"How many hussar uniforms have you?"

"A dozen, if you want them."

"Well, here is my plan. Put four good men into as many complete uniforms. Send them to the chateau tonight. I will watch for them, but will not act unless the plan miscarries. They will announce themselves, and also state that they have come to arrest M. de Saint-Breton on a charge of conspiracy against the King. After they have secured him, they will bring him here. In the morning I shall be with you, and we can carry out the rest of our plans without interruption."

"Good. It shall be done."

"You will not fail me?"

The man, a surly-looking fellow, with a large hooked nose and a heavy black moustache, that shadowed a cruel mouth and a bull-dog chin, swaggered up to Argeneau and laid a heavy hand upon his shoulder.

"See here, Paul Bellefontaine," said he, gruffly, "when I say a thing I mean it. And when I say it's a go, why, damme, it's a go. So, don't you worry. I'll be there when the time comes. Now you get back to the chateau and leave the rest to me. I'll be there, or my name's not Pierre Dubosc."

"All right, Dubosc, I will see you in the morning."

Turning on his heel, Argeneau left the cave, mounted his horse, and rode back to the chateau, well pleased with what he had done.

The reader already knows the result of this enterprise. But when Argeneau returned to the cave at an early hour next morning, he was enraged to learn that Lepage had had his neck broken, and Dubosc was suffering from a bullet wound in his shoulder, while de Saint-Breton was far out of reach. He pronounced them a pack of cowards for running away and complained that they had left Lepage where he had fallen on the highway.

He then called for two volunteers, and immediately set out with them to recover the body of the dead hussar.

While they were thus engaged, and just before they turned out of the wood into the highway, Argeneau saw Selma's carriage pass, and his old love for her became the subject of his meditation. The more he thought, the more his imagination played. He knew she was averse to him, but he believed that under certain circumstances, she might learn to regard him in a better light. It suddenly occurred to him that it was possible to arrange those circumstances himself. All it required was a bold dash, and before anything could be done to prevent it, he could abduct Selma from the carriage

and carry her off to the cave, where in the course of time he hoped to bring her to her senses, and make her see the advisability of becoming his bride. His presumption was founded upon the belief that he possessed the secret of her origin, and he felt that when he should make known the truth (he was satisfied that he had the truth) she would be so humiliated that his advances would in all probability be received with more favor.

It is surprising that a man with sufficient common sense to know better, should abandon himself to such villainy. Argeneau, in his wild imagination, forgot that the late Baron de Banyan had been his benefactor; forgot that Selma had been very kind to him; forgot that the present master of Chateau Blanc had placed considerable confidence in him, and for the nonce he even forgot that he had robbed his benefactor, maligned the woman he loved, and deceived the man who was disposed to trust him. But when such a character determines to do a dastardly deed, it is not such abandonment after all.

As the reader already knows, this last piece of treachery cost him his life.

CHAPTER XIV.

A BAS LA COCARDE.

Argeneau's villainy set de Banyan thinking. For a long time he paced the floor of his library with lowering brows and compressed lips. He was pondering a deep problem. Had he known that Argeneau had been enamoured of Selma, the solution would have been easier; but she had not told him of this, and he was therefore nonplussed. He recalled the conversation he had had with Argeneau concerning her; he reflected upon what Selma had told him about Argeneau and the hussars; then he pondered the tragedy of the morning, but

could make nothing out of it all than that Argeneau had been playing the devil generally, and had ended in losing his life. Argeneau's connection with the bandits, and also with the hussars, was beyond his comprehension, and it angered him the more he thought of it. He despised a traitor above all things else. He was annoyed at himself for having placed confidence in him, and he felt alarmed when he remembered that Argeneau had been his uncle's confidential secretary.

"Oh, the scoundrel!" he exclaimed,

time and again, as he paced the floor. "The traitorous scoundrel! And to think that my uncle trusted him! To think that he has lived so long near her!"

Presently a new thought presented itself. He stepped to his *escritoire* and rang for his valet, then continued pacing the floor. So absorbed was he that he did not hear the parting of the *portieres*, as his valet entered.

"Did you ring, monsieur?" said the young man, after waiting a moment at the doorway.

De Banyan turned with a quick, nervous movement.

"Send Antoine to me at once," said he.

The valet bowed and disappeared. The curtains had hardly ceased swaying to and fro when Antoine appeared.

"It seems you are a good shot, Antoine," said de Banyan abruptly.

Antoine's countenance signified that he appreciated the compliment.

"I have seldom missed my mark, monsieur," said he, with a self-complacent air.

"Then you have reason to believe that Argeneau is dead?"

"If I ever see him again, monsieur, I shall think it is his ghost."

"You were careful in your aim?"

"It was in self-defence, monsieur. I did not know the man was Argeneau. My aim was deliberate, and I meant to kill."

"You have known of the existence of this band of outlaws for some time?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur. Several mail coach robberies have occurred within the last year, and always in this locality. Some time ago a coach in which M. de Saint-Breton was travelling was attacked by masked men, but as the passengers defended themselves with their pistols, the bandits were driven off."

"How long ago was this?"

"About three months, monsieur."

"Has anything been done to break up this band of desperadoes?"

"A detachment of hussars have been stationed at Rouillé, that is all, monsieur."

"You say hussars?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Who commands them?"

"Major Parquin, monsieur."

"Ah, I think I know him. Very well.

That is good. Now Antoine, order the *caleche*, and prepare to accompany me. Since you are so handy with them, don't forget your pistols, we may need them again. Be ready in half an hour."

At the time appointed de Banyan was ready to start.

On this occasion he wore a civilian costume, and a black chapeau, decorated with a rosette of red, white and blue ribbon, underneath which was a small double bow of violet.

On his way through the corridor he stopped at the door of Selma's boudoir and knocked. Julie answered and announced him to her mistress, Selma was reclining upon a divan, but immediately rose to her feet.

"Ah, Maurice," said she, coming toward him, with a pleasant smile. "I was just thinking of you."

"I am glad you were not suffering from the effects of this morning's experience," said he, stepping through the doorway. "I am about to visit my old friend, Major Parquin, at Rouillé, on important business, and I could not leave without inquiring after your health."

"That is kind of you, Maurice. I am better now, thank you, but I cannot help thinking of that awful tragedy. It seems so like some horrid nightmare that I can scarcely believe it to have happened."

"It would be better to forget it."

"I wish I could."

"Argeneau has proven himself a villain."

"I know it."

"He is not worth thinking about."

"But the impression is there, nevertheless."

"Try to banish it. I cannot bear to think of your discomfort."

"How kind you are. But what of yourself? Are you not overtaking your own nerves? A fractured arm is not an easy thing to bear, I am sure."

"Have no fear of me. It is not the first wound I have had to recover from."

"No, that scar upon your face tells me that. Nevertheless, Maurice, I shall be anxious about you, and for my sake, if you will not for your own, you must promise to take care of yourself."

"Oh, very well, then, I promise," said he, with a laugh.

"Then why do you undertake this visit to-day?"

"It is of vast importance."

"Does it concern what has happened?"

"Yes. The coming of those hussars last night is mysterious to me. I am uneasy about the Countess de Vilma and my friends. Besides these desperadoes, who are bold enough to waylay a private conveyance in broad daylight, must be exterminated. I must notify Major Parquin of what has happened, and urge him to adopt severe measures."

"Could not Antoine tell M. le Commandant of this?"

"I must see him personally. It seems strange to me that he has not ridden us of these bandits ere this. If necessary I shall offer my services."

At this announcement, Selma started, and a look of anxiety came into her face that made de Banyan regret what he had said.

"Maurice," said she, earnestly, "whatever you do, remember that you are all I have, and that I shall be very anxious about you."

"You will have no cause for anxiety,"

said he, in a laughing manner. "I assure you I shall not go a step beyond the scope of duty."

"But you men have such strange thoughts of duty. You are so venturesome, so reckless."

"Never, when the pleasant recollections of such women as you inspire us with caution," said he, with a look of admiration in his dark, laughing eyes.

A warm blush mounted to her cheek, yet she smiled and showed her pearly teeth.

"You are quite a courtier, monsieur," said she, jocosely. "It is a wonder the King has never sent for you."

"The King knows I am not a royalist. This fact alone is sufficient to preclude me from his court," replied de Banyan. "But should I ever be admitted to His Majesty's presence, he will certainly find me honest in my opinions."

"You are incorrigible," she cried, with a laugh.

Then, coming nearer, she began to arrange the handkerchief a little more gracefully about his disabled arm.

"Do be careful, Maurice," she murmured.

"For your sake, Selma, I will do nothing rash," said he, in a low, earnest tone.

Then bidding her *au revoir*, he hurried down to the *caleche* awaiting him at the foot of the grand staircase.

His appearance caused Antoine considerable uneasiness.

"Monsieur," he exclaimed, in surprise, as de Banyan stepped into the *caleche*, "you wear the cockade of the Empire."

"Yes," answered de Banyan, "it is my intention to wear it."

"It will be dangerous, monsieur."

"I shall wear it, Antoine, nevertheless. I am not ashamed of it. I have never worn any other, and what is more, I never shall."

"Whither do we go, monsieur?"

"To Rouillé."

"*Pardieu!* it will be dangerous."

"You have your pistols, Antoine?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then start the carriage."

The next moment the *caleche* was rattling over the gravel of the driveway toward the park gates, and Antoine was worrying over the possible trouble in store for them.

The village of Rouillé was less than a league from Chateau Blanc. You could see the smoke from its chimneys curling up over the hill-tops, while standing upon the landing of the grand staircase, and when the wind was favorable, you could often hear the shouts of children, as they played upon the green sward. There was a church in the village which, during the Revolution, had been used as a stable for horses, then as a barracks for soldiers, but after Napoleon restored religion and churches to France, it had been re-established, and a barracks had been built to serve as a recruiting post for cavalry.

There were people in the village who could say that they had taken prominent parts in the horrors of the Revolution, and there was one man especially who could boast that when quite a lad he had carried the head of an aristocrat through the streets of Paris upon a pike. This man was known as Jean Pitou, and he was very proud of his aversion to the aristocrats.

Madame la Guillotine also had paid her respects to this village, and it is stated that her executions afforded considerable merriment to the throngs of morbid spectators who came to gloat over her awful accomplishment. A brother of the original lord of Chateau Blanc had, in this same village, paid to Madame la Guillotine the penalty for being a member of the aristocracy, and when his venerable head fell into the basket, despite the gray hairs, the vil-

lagers laughed and shouted themselves hoarse.

There were honest people at Rouillé, however, who were still loyal to the Empire and its champion, but amongst them were quite a number of these *sans culotte* who entertained the same aversion to authority, the same thirst for blood, and the same readiness to rise in revolt that existed in the days of the Revolution. And what is said of the village of Rouillé might be truthfully said of dozens of other villages throughout France at that particular period. This unruly disposition of the *sans culotte*, however, had been nearly subdued by the iron hand of the great Emperor, but after his abdication, it wanted only a brand from the smouldering fires of anti-Imperialism to set it ablaze again with all its destructive tendency. It is a well-known fact that in this unpretentious village, on the 21st of April, 1814, the Emperor Napoleon was burned in effigy by a howling mob of fanatics, whose political sentiments were as capricious as the winds.

Just at present, however, things were comparatively quiet. The King, whose royal brother had been beheaded in the presence of many who were now living at Rouillé, was giving great satisfaction. Peace had been declared, and the man who had been so careless of French blood was an exile. Great as had been the objection to the Bourbons once, so great was the approval of the Bourbons now. But twenty years is a long time, and during such a period people have ample opportunity to reflect and even change their minds. It is surprising how many of the villagers of Rouillé forgot that they had taken such violent opposition to the Bourbons as history records, but it was only after Napoleon's star began to pale that they began to forget. It was only after the horrors of Russia, the defeats of Prussia, and the invasion of the Allies that they

believed they could reconcile themselves to the presence of a King. They had had enough of bloodshed, enough of conquest, enough of glory, and so anxious were they for peace, that they wilfully ignored the fact that Louis XVIII. had been forced upon them by a foreign power.

Such were the people of Rouillé, and it was to this village that de Banyan was driving.

There were curious eyes upon him as he entered the village. The arrival of a stranger at Rouillé was always the signal for a gathering of idlers, and de Banyan's coming was not an exception to the rule.

When he stopped at the inn of the Cheval Blanc, for the purpose of leaving the *caleche*, while he walked over to the barracks, several men who had been lazily smoking their pipes on the porch, rose from their high-backed benches and stood gazing at him in a listless attitude. They were sullen-faced men and poorly clad. Two of them had been conscripts in the last campaign. Another wore a dirty white ribbon at his button hole, and a broad band of crape on his hat.

Presently one of the conscripts removed his pipe from his mouth, and pointing with the stem at de Banyan's chapeau, made a remark which immediately aroused his neighbor from his temporary apathy. Then the man with the pipe nudged the man with the white ribbon, and pointed to the chapeau. No sooner did this man catch sight of the object than he became excited, and hurrying among his comrades, in a very few moments had them imbued with the same uneasiness as himself.

Presently a hoarse voice called out very lustily:

"Down with the cockade!"

As de Banyan turned to discover if possible who had shouted, he was greeted with sullen scowls.

"Monsieur, there will be trouble in a moment," said Antoine, uneasily. "It would be well to drive at once to the barracks."

"Bah!" cried de Banyan. "The fellow is a churl. If I had not this broken arm, I would give him a taste of the horse whip."

"Down with the cockade!" cried another voice from the back part of the porch. "Down with the tri-colors! No true citizen wears it now. Down with the cockade!"

"My friends," said de Banyan, "the cockade you have taken exceptions to has been with me at Austerlitz, Eylau, Essling, Wagram, Friedland, Borodino and Dresden. Would you have me discard it for one that has never left the boundaries of France, except in flight before the eagles of our Emperor?"

"A Bonapartist!" howled some one in the crowd which was fast gathering.

"An officer of the Old Guard!" cried a gray-haired veteran, with one leg gone. "I know him. It is Monsieur le Colonel de Banyan, who led the —th Chasseurs in that gallant charge at Borodino of which I have so often told you. Respect, friends, for a brave gentleman."

"He is a Bonapartist, and he wears the tri-colors!" was the retort.

"Down with the cockade! Down with the Bonapartist!" cried the man who wore the white ribbon.

And "down with the cockade" rang obstreperously from mouth to mouth.

"Monsieur," said Antoine, nervously, "may I not drive on?"

"Do you think I am going to let a howling pack of loungers give me the rout?" exclaimed de Banyan, indignantly.

At this juncture a man elbowed his way to the side of the *caleche* with a determination that set every one wondering. He was a tall, sinister-looking fellow of the

peasant order, with a countenance resembling that of the notorious Marat, and his cruel mouth and snapping eyes looked devilish as he paused to gaze insolently at de Banyan.

"You do not heed, monsieur," said he, with a hiss. "You do not intend to remove the cockade?"

"I have not the slightest notion of it," replied de Banyan, irritated by the man's insolence.

"Then I will remove it for you!" cried the fellow with another hiss.

And suiting the action to the word, he sprang upon the step of the carriage, and struck de Banyan's chapeau from his head. As it fell to the ground, he crushed it beneath his foot, amid the clamorous approval of the crowd that had gathered.

Without a moment's reflection de Banyan caught the whip out of Antoine's hand, sprang to the ground and struck the fellow a stinging blow across the face.

"You scoundrel!" he cried, bringing the whip down again. "You dare to commit such an outrage? I'll teach you better manners!"

The fellow howled with pain, and showed that he was a coward; but de Banyan did not spare him. Several times the whip cut across his back before the crowd could recover from their astonishment. Then two men sprang forward, as if to seize de Banyan's arm. Antoine, perceiving their intentions, immediately sprang up in the carriage with his pistols cocked and levelled at the crowd.

"Keep back there!" he cried. "Keep back all of you! The first man who touches Monsieur, will get a taste of lead!"

There was something in the expression of Antoine's face which signified that he would carry out his threat. Besides, the frowning muzzles of the pistols were not

to be treated with indifference, and the men hesitated. The crowd howled, and showed a tendency to scatter; then they seemed to change their minds, and started back, as if they would annihilate de Banyan.

But at this threatening moment there was heard the sound of galloping horses, and several of the crowd turned to see what it meant.

"The hussars are coming!" some one cried. "Quick, disperse, the hussars are coming! Look out for the hussars!"

De Banyan had finished his castigation, and, under the protection of Antoine's pistols, was climbing back into the *caleche*, when the hussars dashed into view around the corner of the street. There were only four of them, but as soon as they understood de Banyan's predicament, they formed themselves on either side of the *caleche* and at his request escorted him to the barracks.

"He is a brave man," said the old veteran, who had spoken in his favour before. "You should have seen him at Borodino, when he got that slash across his face. Besides, did you not observe that he carries his left arm in a sling?"

"Ah, yes, monsieur is a very brave man indeed," said his neighbour. "No one would have dared whip Jean Pitou, even with both arms at his service."

"He is the devil!" exclaimed Jean Pitou, who had just come near them, rubbing his smarting body.

"You have reason to know it," said the army veteran with a smile.

"And he will have reason to regret it," said Jean Pitou, with a vicious expression. "I am not one who forgives."

"You are not likely to forgive," said the army veteran. "He has marked your face well. I should not like to wear that scar myself."

"Peace, old man," cried Jean Pitou, in a rage. "Peace, I say, or even your

crutch and your gray hairs may not save you."

"You would not strike a cripple, would you, Jean?" said the veteran.

"Not if he holds his tongue, but have a care."

Whereupon the army veteran concluded that it would be wise to hold his peace.

The crowd now gradually dispersed, but not until many had trodden upon the chapeau and cockade which de Banyan had left behind, and which had been the cause of so much trouble.

After they had gone, the army veteran picked up the chapeau, and, brushing the dirt from it, buttoned it up in his coat.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT DE BANYAN LEARNED AT THE BARRACKS.

It was not until de Banyan had gained the interior of the barracks that he was completely out of danger. On three occasions stones were thrown by some one concealed among the houses; one hit the horse of one of the hussars, another struck the back of the *caleche*, and another skimmed over the ears of the horse which Antoine was driving. At each throw one or the other of the hussars galloped away in the direction whence the stones came, but could find no one upon whom he might vent his wrath, and it was not until the gates of the barracks were passed that there prevailed a general feeling of relief.

That de Banyan was out of humour follows as a natural sequence; but there was considerable satisfaction in knowing that he had given his principal offender his just deserts. One thing, however, bothered him greatly: If the people of Rouillé were such fanatical anti-Imperialists, what could he expect from an officer in the service of the King. His hope was that he might find him a Bonapartist at heart, and ready to assist him; but although he knew the Commandant, he was not sure that he had not, like Jourdan, Marmont, Murat, Bernadotte, and Jomini, gone over to the Bourbons heart and hand. Believing, however, that the sooner he ascertained Major Parquin's political views the better, on reaching

the barracks he made his way to the Commandant's quarters without delay.

Major Parquin was a large, round, ruddy-faced man, with considerable bluster in his manner, and a very red nose. The flare of purple veins in his cheeks suggested that he had tasted much wine in his time, and had experienced considerable bad weather. His eyes were watery, but not from sentiment. His bearing was that of a soldier who prided himself upon an erect posture. He had seen service in Egypt, Italy, Spain and Russia, and his heavy voice, which suggested the rumbling of thunder, had been cultivated amid the din of battle.

"Ah, my dear Colonel," he exclaimed, as de Banyan entered, "this is indeed an honour. But, by my sword, I am sorry you are wounded. Why, let me see; we have not met since the catastrophe at Moscow, and it was the devil's own mess we were in then. I have wondered many a time since if your bones were not bleaching somewhere in that terrible country. Pray be seated. It does my eyes good to see you again."

And shaking de Banyan's well arm most cordially, he backed him into a chair.

"Well," said de Banyan, as he sank into the chair, "had it not been for the timely arrival of four of your hussars just now, it is quite probable that you would

not have seen me at all, for something serious was about to happen."

"Why, how is that?" exclaimed the Major, in surprise.

He had resumed the seat at his writing desk, in which de Banyan found him upon entering.

"The fact of the matter is, my dear Parquin, you have a very bloodthirsty lot of villagers about you. The old spirit of revolution is something more than a smouldering ember here, I can assure you."

"Guns and cannister, my dear de Banyan, what has happened?"

The Major was deeply interested.

The moment was a critical one for de Banyan, since upon his reply hung condemnation or approval; but he saw the opportunity of learning the Major's politics, and he did not hesitate.

"Well, to tell you the truth, my dear Parquin, said he, jocosely, "I was rash enough to venture into the village with the tri-colors on my hat, on account of which I have been mobbed."

A cloud suddenly swept over the Commandant's features, and he leaned forward with a jerk.

"*Sacre nom!*" he growled, "were you so imprudent as that?"

De Banyan, who had been eyeing the Major closely, nodded and went on.

"My chapeau has been destroyed, and my cockade has been trampled into the dust. They made quite a fuss over that bit of ribbon. The red, white and blue is to them what the red scarf of the toréador is to a mad bull. I am now under the extreme necessity of asking you for the loan of a hat."

"It is at your service, and welcome," said the Major, taking down a high hat, which hung on a peg near him, and handing it to de Banyan, "but it was very imprudent of you to wear the tri-colors."

"So I discovered. But this locality

used to be so strongly Bonapartist that I feared nothing."

Parquin glanced hurriedly about the apartment.

"Then you love the violet?" said he, in a low tone.

"What then?" answered de Banyan, leaning forward.

"It will return in the spring," said Parquin.

It was the old challenge and reply and signified a Bonapartist. They looked each other straight in the eyes, and realized that they were of the same sentiments. Upon making this discovery, a feeling of great satisfaction came over de Banyan.

"Are we alone?" he asked.

Parquin rose from his seat, and made a careful inspection of the room, looking out of the windows, and even opening and closing the outer door.

"Quite alone," said he.

Then stepping to a cabinet near at hand he took down a decanter of wine, and two glasses, which he placed upon his writing desk.

"I invite you to drink with me the health of Corporal Violet," said he, filling the glasses.

"With pleasure," answered de Banyan.

They raised their glasses and saluted.

"Long live Corporal Violet," said de Banyan.

"May he return in the Spring," said Parquin.

And they quaffed the beverage at a swallow.

For a moment they were both silent and thoughtful. Parquin was the first to speak.

"Have you heard the latest news from Paris?" said he.

"No. What are they doing now?"

"A courier brought me the news this morning, that the King, not satisfied with restoring the ecclesiastics to power, and

encouraging their religious processions, their sermons and their *Te Deums* in his behalf, is about to erect a monument to that arch traitor Cadoudal. That villain, who led his Chouans and Vendéans against the Imperial Government, and who with Pichegru, Danonville and Moreau, conspired against the life of the Emperor."

De Banyan looked at the Major in amazement.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he cried, indignantly. "What an outrage! Oh, these Bourbons! These stupid Bourbons! When will they cease their insults! Why were they forced upon us after all the blood that has been spilt to keep them out of France. Ah, my friend, it is high time the Emperor should return. These contemptible Bourbons are ruining even their own cause."

"It is a bad business, and I am sorely tempted to resign my commission on account of it," said Parquin, in a melancholy tone.

"No, do not do that," replied de Banyan, quickly. "You can serve the Emperor better here. How many men have you?"

"Three hundred and forty."

"What are their sentiments?"

"They would follow the Emperor to the ends of the earth. Every one of them carries the tri-colors in the lining of his shako."

"Then it is for you to remain with them and be ready at the proper time."

"Think you so?"

"You could not possibly serve our cause better. You will be in a position to lead the sentiments of your men in the right direction."

The Commandant reflected.

"Very well, then," said he, presently.

"So long as there is hope my sword remains in readiness."

"But these villagers must be looked

after, Parquin," said de Banyan. "It will never do to let them grow so presumptuous."

"They shall pay dearly for what they have done. I shall immediately investigate the matter and shall arrest every one of them who took part in this outrage. Gad's life! between these villagers and the bandits I have been sent to capture, I shall have my hands full."

"Ah! I was nearly forgetting. It is of these bandits I wish to speak," said de Banyan, with spirit.

And then he told of his morning's experience, the death of Argeneau, and the visit of the hussars the night before.

"Now, why," said he, "were those hussars at my chateau, inquiring for M. de Saint-Breton, who happened to be a guest of mine?"

"*Pardieu!* I was not aware of the fact."

"Then you did not send them?"

"Name of a pipe! no. Why should I? I do not even know of M. de Saint-Breton."

"Humph! that is strange."

"Are you sure they were my men?"

"They were hussars, and as your detachment is the only one in this vicinity, I naturally concluded they were yours."

"Well, they were not my men at all.

They were bandits in a discarded uniform of the — Hussars."

"Ah, you are sure of this?"

"Quite sure. Early this morning one of their number was found dead on the highway. Near him was a dead horse. The horse had been shot, the man's neck had been broken. It was quite evident that they had made an attack upon some one last night; possibly your friends. The result of the escapade is not yet known. Your friends may have got off alright, or they may have met with some serious reverses. This remains to be seen. My impression is, they got off

alright. But, as I say, we shall see. For some time this band of marauders have been giving trouble in this locality, and I am at present at a loss to locate them. This much I have learned. They are led by a man named Dubosc, and are a desperate lot. Their method of operation is to appear in their hussar uniforms, and, under the guise of soldiers, they are enabled to approach travelling coaches without giving an alarm. The attack is sudden, and our disbanded soldiers are blamed for it. A few days ago, Captain Montluc, one of my officers, found a clue to their *rendezvous*, and is now, with fifty men, undertaking their capture. Yesterday he sent word that he would have the whole band secured in a very short time. I am expecting to hear from him again at any hour."

"I sincerely hope he will succeed. But what annoys me perhaps the most is the treachery of my secretary, Argeneau. It seems my uncle has had him in his service about two years."

"Your uncle has been writing his memoirs of Egypt; that accounts for Argeneau being employed."

"His memoirs! Why, I was not aware of the fact. I have not come across them, and Argeneau never mentioned them to me. Do you know this for a fact, or do you only guess at it?"

"Well, about two years ago I met the late baron in Paris. He told me then that he was about to begin his memoirs of the Egyptian campaign, and he asked me to give him some facts relating to an expedition which I undertook against the Mamelukes."

"But why did not Argeneau tell me of these memoirs? And stranger still, why has not my cousin spoken of them?"

"Argeneau may have had reasons for not letting you know of their existence; it is quite evident that he would stop at nothing. As for mademoiselle, she may

not have had occasion to mention them; or else she did not know of them at all. The baron was very reticent about some things, and he may never have mentioned the memoirs to his daughter."

The conversation at this juncture was suddenly interrupted by the sound of horses clattering over the pavement outside, followed by several emphatic commands from an officer.

The Commandant sprang to the window and looked out. De Banyan followed his example.

"*Morbleu!*" exclaimed Parquin. "It is Captain Montluc and his men returned."

"They have been successful," said de Banyan, "they have several prisoners."

"They have had a fight too," said Parquin, "the captain is wounded, and some of his men are missing. Ah, he is dismounting. He will be here in a moment."

The Commandant was in an exultant mood, and as he turned from the window his smiling face portrayed his feelings. They had scarcely resumed their seats when the door opened, and Captain Montluc entered. He was a fine specimen of a soldier, and quite young. There was no doubt about his being wounded. Around his head was knotted a blood-stained handkerchief, and he carried his right arm in a sling.

His report to the Commandant was to the effect that he had surprised the bandits in their cave, whereupon a fierce fight had ensued, and after losing seven of his men and killing five of the bandits, he had captured four of the desperadoes, among whom was their chief, Dubosc. He was satisfied that the band was now broken up, and he was certain that no further trouble would arise. After making his report the Captain left the room to seek the services of the surgeon.

De Banyan, who had overheard all,

was gratified to learn the result of the expedition, and when he understood that Dubosc was among the prisoners, he determined, if possible, to have an interview with him, in hopes of learning something of Argeneau's history.

"Speak to him, by all means, my dear Colonel," said Parquin, when permission was asked. "The villain may know more than we imagine."

De Banyan immediately had the prisoner brought before him. The result of the interview was quite satisfactory. Much that Dubosc related, however, the reader already knows. But there were some things in the bandit's narrative concerning Argeneau, which have not yet been recorded.

It seems that when the Marquis de Trèpeson's band of desperadoes was broken up, and the notorious Chouan spy, named Benedict Bellefontaine, lost his life, his son Paul, a mere boy, escaped and fled to Paris, where, from fear of being associated with the Chouans, on account of his name, and arrested, he assumed the *nom de guerre* of Argeneau, and lived as best he could among the poor of Washer Woman's Lane.

One day, however, at one of the reviews in the Place du Carrousal, he approached the Emperor and asked that he might have admission into the school at St. Cyr. The request was granted, and he became a student at the expense of the Government.

After he had finished his education, he served as secretary to different officers of the army. He was with Gérard, and afterward sought and received employment of General de Banyan, at Chateau Blanc, the old rendezvous of the Chouans, and which years before had been his home.

Now Dubosc had been associated with de Trèpeson's Chouans also, but later in life joined a regiment of hussars, and served

as a sergeant in several campaigns. He was at Jena, Wagram and Leipsic, and did good service. But after the Restoration, his regiment had been disbanded by the King, and being out of employment, he recalled his old occupation, gathered a number of his hussar comrades about him, and resumed operations as a bandit, attacking travelling coaches whenever the opportunity afforded, and with considerable success.

On learning that the son of his old friend was at Chateau Blanc, Dubosc managed to have an interview with him, and, without much trouble, induced him to act in the same capacity with him that the young man's father had acted with the old Marquis, that is to say, Argeneau became Dubosc's informant of danger, and of anything new in the way of an enterprise, and in many instances he was the instigator and leader. So, coming naturally by his treacherous nature, it is not surprising that his deeds were anything but meritorious.

De Banyan wondered how bad his affairs had become on account of Argeneau's connection with them, and if he started for home immediately after the interview with Dubosc, it was because of the trouble he anticipated.

It was late, however, when he left the barracks. Fortunately, there was no further demonstrations of disapproval on the part of the *sans culotte*, but on passing the last cottage of the village, he was accosted by the old army veteran who had spoken in his favour at the Chevel Blanc.

"Monsieur," said the old cripple, as the carriage stopped, "permit me to restore your chapeau."

"Ah, that is very good of you, my man," said de Banyan, taking the hat which the old fellow had carefully cleaned. "Now you can do me still another favour by taking this one, with my compliments,

to M. le Major Parquin at the barracks," he added, removing the hat he wore.

"Certainly, monsieur, it gives me pleasure to be of service."

"How shall I reward you?"

"I want no reward, monsieur," said the man, with considerable pride. "I serve him willingly who is brave enough to wear the tri-colors in times like these."

De Banyan drew a Napoleon from his pocket.

"Well, then, my good man," said he, offering the coin, "at least you must drink the health of Corporal Violet at my expense."

"With pleasure, monsieur," said the veteran, taking the gold, and touching

his cap. "Corporal Violet shall be well toasted."

De Banyan directed Antoine to drive on. The horse had no sooner started than the veteran called after them. Again the *caleche* stopped.

"Monsieur," said the veteran, coming up, "beware of Jean Pitou."

"And who is Jean Pitou?"

"The man whom you whipped to-day. He means vengeance."

De Banyan broke into a laugh.

"Oh, very well, then, I will keep my eyes open," said he, merrily. "Thank you, my friend, and adieu."

This time the *caleche* rattled down the road and did not stop until it reached the chateau.

CHAPTER XVI.

VIVE L'EMPEREUR.

After a man has stepped into a comfortable inheritance, even though the prospects are bright, it requires time to grow familiar with his affairs, and if he is blessed with any business capabilities whatever, it follows as a natural sequence that he should wish to know just how matters stand with him. Therefore, if de Banyan became very practical, and even preoccupied, it was because he realized that he had considerable yet to learn concerning his estate. He determined to make a thorough investigation, and since Argeneau had proven such a rascal, he fully expected to find things in a pretty bad shape.

His fractured arm hindered him greatly, but with the aid of his *valet de chambre* he succeeded in getting over considerable work which was decidedly humdrum, and anything but favourable to his recovery.

Dr. Blauvelt had cautioned him against exertion of any kind; but as he had been accustomed to hard work, under even less favourable conditions, he laugh-

ed at the doctor's premonitions and continued his investigations, regardless of possible results.

Selma being also deeply concerned, did her best to lure him from his task, and was not a little piqued at her failure. One day, when he had been longer than usual in her company, and had listened to the beautiful music which she played for him upon her harp, until he almost lost himself in a delightful reverie, he suddenly sprang to his feet with the remark that he had stayed beyond his time.

"Ah, Maurice," cried Selma, a little pensively, "You are not at all complimentary."

De Banyan turned toward her with a look of surprise. She had leaned her beautiful head against her harp, and was thrumming a few plaintive chords in a manner which signified disappointment.

"Why, what have I been doing; or, rather, what have I not been doing?" said he gently.

"Why, don't you see, Maurice, you

have hinted that I have no attraction for you."

"Oh, no, Selma, you are quite mistaken. From what do you draw your inference?" said he, with a look of chagrin stealing over his face.

"From your actions. Here I have been for three days trying to keep you away from those tiresome accounts, in hopes that you might not overtax yourself. But each time I have failed. The accounts have more attraction than I."

"The accounts have no attraction at all," said he, earnestly, "but the work must be done, and the sooner it is accomplished the sooner will I be at liberty. That is why I keep at them. But if you knew how hard it is for me to concentrate my mind upon those ponderous journals and ledgers, because of my thoughts of you, you would never imagine that you had lost your attraction. With a soldier, however, it is always duty before pleasure, and I must continue my task."

Her fingers were striking a few soft rippling notes from the harp, and a warm blush was blotting out the delicate roses of her cheek.

"And does a soldier think so much of duty that he will forget himself?" she murmured; but suddenly stopping her music, she looked up with an earnest expression. "Ah, Maurice," said she, "think of how you may retard your recovery."

De Banyan stepped to her side and took her hand. His face was illumined with something more than gratitude.

"My dear Selma," said he, "I thank you for your kindly solicitude. It does me more good than the doctor's prescriptions. Yet, for your sake, as well as my own, I must thoroughly investigate my financial affairs. After I have become master of the situation, I shall give you little cause for solicitude."

He raised her hand to his lips, then

started to leave the room, but at the doorway turned, and for a moment contemplated the floor.

"Selma," said he, presently, with an earnest expression, "let me assure you that I fully appreciate your kindly interest. You are my good angel. Life has never been to me what it is now."

Then he left her and returned to his study.

After he had gone she was so happy that when she resumed her harp the music seemed to vibrate through the room like the exquisite harmony of an inspired soul. Now rolling forth in volumes, now trembling away in dulcet tintinabulations, then swelling forth again into bright crescendos, which seemed to be the echo of her heart's glad song, then dying out in a tender diminuendo, as if to suggest how happy were her reflections. Later in the day she seated herself at her easel and began to paint his portrait.

But the days came and went, and still de Banyan worked diligently. Ever with her image before him, and the sound of her voice in his heart, while ever and anon the mystery which overhung her life, rose up like some rugged obstacle which he could not surmount. He had searched everywhere with the hope that some record might have been left, but to no avail. Nothing could be discovered which might throw light upon the subject. His one hope was that Madame Mortier's story was true. Argeneau's insinuations were revolting. He could not bear to think of them, and now that his secretary had proven so treacherous, he concluded that the rascal must have destroyed the records in order to further his own plans. One thing was certain; the books showed that Argeneau had robbed the late baron of several thousand francs, and if he was depraved enough to rob the man who evidently had placed implicit confidence in him, and who had benefited him in many ways, he

certainly would not hesitate to destroy records, if they stood in his way.

One afternoon, however, a singular accident occurred which led to the disclosure of the secret. As de Banyan sat at work in his library, he was suddenly startled by a heavy crash behind him. On turning to discover what had happened, he found that a large picture had broken its cord and fallen to the floor. As he looked at the wall where it had hung he noticed the outline of a small door with a spring lock. On opening this he drew forth a small iron casket which also opened with a spring. It was filled with important papers, one of which was the very record he had been in search of. Ten minutes later he knew that Argeneau had basely lied to him. The paper was in his uncle's handwriting, and not only corroborated Madame Mortier's story of Selma's adoption, but stated that she was the daughter of Captain de Montbars, who had been an aide-de-camp of Napoleon's in Egypt. It also stated that at the battle of St. Jean d'Arc Captain de Montbars lost his life while endeavouring to save that of his General-in-Chief by springing between him and a shell, which burst almost at his feet. For this great sacrifice, and because of the death of her mother, Napoleon had caused her adoption by the late baron, and after he became Emperor, settled upon her an income of thirty thousand francs. Naturally de Banyan rejoiced at his discovery, and having finished his task resolved to court his adopted cousin's company as much as possible.

Then followed a season of happiness, in which pleasant walks and talks, horseback rides, and most enjoyable excursions into the country served to promote Cupid's work.

So the winter passed and the violets returned. But delightful as were these few brief months for de Banyan and

Selma, they did not pass so smoothly for others. France as a nation was uneasy and anxious. For the Bonapartists, it was a period of speculation and planning; for the royalists, a season of anxiety; for the Bourbon King, a spell of blind credulity; for the banished Emperor, a time of alertness and calculation.

At the Congress of Vienna the celebrities of Europe were still quarreling over the topography of a continent, and Talleyrand was scheming harder than ever for the removal of the fallen Emperor to the Azores. It was quite evident that they still feared the man of Elba, and yet while they were planning his greater security, things were shaping themselves at Porto-Ferrajo and throughout France for this dangerous exile's return.

One day at Porto-Ferrajo, a great ball was given, to which all the Elban celebrities were invited. It was under the auspices of Princess Borghèse, and was a great success. The Emperor with all his officers was there, apparently quite contented with his lot, and no one could suspect from his manner that anything unusual was about to happen.

The next morning, however, before those who had attended the ball could recover from its various effects, Napoleon suddenly took it into his head to embark on board the *Inconstant* and set sail for the shores of France, accompanied by twelve hundred grenadiers and officers, in six small vessels. That the enterprise was audacious is certain from the fact that with this mere handful of grenadiers, Napoleon announced, after getting well out to sea, that he was destined to set free a population of thirty millions of people.

When the news came that Napoleon had landed at Cannes, and was advancing towards Paris, de Banyan, with a resolution borne of a sense of duty, set

out to join him. There had been earnest entreaties on the part of Selma, plighted vows on the part of de Banyan, fond embraces and fervent kisses on the part of both, and when Selma recovered herself sufficiently to look at the matter from the standpoint of a brave and loyal woman, she realized that her lover had mounted his charger and had ridden away in the direction of Grenoble. What the result of the enterprise would be she knew not, but in her heart she trembled.

On the night of the 19th, Napoleon reached Fontainebleau, and on the following evening, in fog and rain, entered Paris in an open carriage, preceded by a courier on horseback, who announced his master's arrival.

A few hours previous, Louis XVIII had fled to Holland for protection, and the vacant throne was left to the usurper, who, without bloodshed, had conquered France, amid the acclamations of immense crowds.

Vive l'Empereur resounded through the streets until long after midnight. People shouted themselves hoarse; shouted until they lost their voices; and when they could shout no longer, they listened with considerable satisfaction to the booming of the cannon that had thundered at Marengo, Austerlitz and Dresden, and which shook the brilliantly illumined city until dawn.

It is strange how men forget. It is strange how public favor deviates. Less than a year ago the cry had been, "Down with the Emperor" and "Long live the King"; now it was, "Down with the King" and "Long live the Emperor." What an innovation!

There were men who seemed to live anew. There were men who wept when he passed, and smiled happily through their tears after he had gone. There were men who strove to forget their sworn allegiance to the Bourbons, and

who sought to establish their never-failing loyalty to the Emperor. There were others who trembled at the sight of him, and still others who sagely shook their venerable heads and wondered what would come of it all. Yet, in one tremendous chorus they thundered their huzzas, and crowded about the Emperor until he was obliged to cry out, "My friends, you stifle me!"

None saw, however, the looks from evil eyes. None guessed the resentment smouldering in the hearts of hundreds among that clamoring multitude. In that hour of excitement everyone was busy with his own feelings.

For the Bonapartists, it was a day of triumph; for the royalists, a day of fate. From the time Napoleon set foot upon French soil it had been one grand ovation, a sort of royal and triumphal progress; so that in conversation at the Tuileries, with his old friend Caulaincourt, he had good reason for saying, that the success of his rash venture was a return once more of that dazzling good fortune, which had spoiled him during so many years.

In the Tuileries the Emperor found all his old ministers, his generals and his courtiers assembled. All were desirous of seeing and greeting him. An immense concourse of people surged around the entrance on the stairway, and his *aides-de-camp* were compelled to carry him in their arms up the grand staircase, and thence into the royal apartments, amid exultant cries of *Vive l'Empereur*.

To re-establish his authority, re-organize his government and create a new army, that would enable him to meet his enemies in the field, required time. But that he was not idle is certain, from the fact that during the eighty-four days of his stay in Paris he re-established his authority all over France, tranquilized the country generally, put down royalist

risings, obtained money for his military wants, adjusted the national finances, restored the civil administrations everywhere, and organized an army of three hundred thousand soldiers, most of them veterans, besides an Imperial Guard of forty thousand men, who were ready to follow him to the ends of the earth.

But in all his hurry he forgot to disarm those two arch-traitors, Talleyrand and Fouché, and it is probably due to his clemency that they were permitted finally, under the guise of friendship, to plot his second downfall.

During this excitement and preparation de Banyan was not idle. Having been assigned to his old regiment, he entered upon his duties with an energy which was equal to the emergency, and in due time had his men ready for the field. Then orders came to march in three days to meet the enemy. This gave de Banyan sufficient time to hasten home to Selma. Their parting was an affecting one, but like the brave woman she was, she bade him God speed, and promised to pray for him until his return.

Then followed in quick succession the

battles of Ligny, Quatre-Bras and Waterloo, with their disastrous effects to the French, and their strange enigmas to the world. It has been stated that this last campaign was a series of blunders on the part of the French generals, and a succession of amazing triumphs on the part of the allies. But the establishing of the truth of this must be left to history. Suffice it to say, however, that every loyal man in that terrible struggle fought nobly, and among them was no braver soldier than Colonel Baron de Banyan. He was often in the thickest of the fight, and his men received a new stimulus whenever they beheld him. At Waterloo three horses fell under him, and the last seen of him he was leading his regiment of chasseurs against the British squares.

When night came the pale moon looked down upon a field of carnage, and a fleeing, almost annihilated army; and instead of the croaking of frogs, the songs of insects and the fluting of nightingales, there were heard disconsolate cries of anguish and of woe, and the shouts of victorious pursuers.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WOUNDED PRISONER.

After Waterloo, the Allies invaded France, and for the second time Napoleon was obliged to abdicate. Things were not favourable for the fallen Emperor even in his own country, or among his own people. His cause was forever lost, and his family ruined. The Allies had proscribed him, and declared to the French nation that they were not fighting France, but the Ogre of Corsica. His marshals were discouraged, indignant and resentful, and the very men whom he had benefitted the most became his bitterest enemies. Fouché, at the head of a provisional government, advised him to flee to America, and then treacherously notified the Allies of the advice he had given, that they might pursue the illustrious refugee and capture him. Nevertheless, Napoleon hesitated to take the advice of his old Minister of Police, and it was not until the 29th of June, eleven days after Waterloo, that he left Malmaison, accompanied by Marshal Bertrand, Las Casas, Savary, and a few of his attached servants, attended by a small guard of mounted men. The first night he slept at Rambouillet, the second at Tours, the third at Niort. On July 3rd he reached Rochefort, and on the 8th of August he was on board the *Northumberland*, on his way to St. Helena.

Meanwhile, the days at Chateau Blanc were full of anxiety. From the distance resounded the thunder of war, while ever and anon detachments of French soldiers, in complete disorder, hurried along the highway in the direction of Paris.

From her window Selma watched them with beating heart, and it was all Madame Mortier could do to comfort her. One day the fighting was nearer, the roar of cannon louder, the rattle of musketry heavier, the yelling of combatants wilder and fiercer. Sometimes it was the cry of *Vive l'Empereur*, then again it was the German cry of *Fatherland*, and "On to Paris." Before the close of the day the two armies swarmed into view, and a shell burst in the park almost at the foot of the grand stairway of the chateau. An hour later the French were a broken rabble, fleeing before the victorious Prussians. When night came the camp fires of the Prussians could be seen in all directions.

Madame Mortier knew something of war. She had followed her husband—who, by the way, was killed in Egypt at the Battle of the Pyramids—in more than one campaign, and knew what it meant to be at the mercy of a victorious enemy, and if she trembled at the thought of what might befall the inmates of Chateau Blanc, it was because of the terrible deeds she had seen committed by the very French who were now at the mercy of an enraged and long abused enemy. To the victor belong the spoils, and she knew not how soon Chateau Blanc might fall a prey to the Prussian soldiers. But Selma thought not of this; she was never before in such an alarming juxtaposition to an hostile army. She thought only of her lover, and wept that she had no news of him. But could she have witnessed the succeeding

events since his leavetaking, and have known the conspicuous part he had played ; could she have seen him at Waterloo, intrepid, terrible, and have realized his dangers, his miraculous escapes, his fearless efforts to lead his men to the very cannon's mouth, and his final disappearance, she would have had sufficient cause for alarm. Then could she have beheld the blood-stained form that lay beneath the very cannon which belched forth its grape and cannister into the last of the Old Guard, after Cambronne had refused to surrender, she probably would not have known that it lay there from exhaustion alone, and would have lost all hope. But after the moon arose, and the night of that eventful day was far advanced, could she have observed that recumbent form as it came back to life and action, and have seen the man for whom her heart beat so fervently, rise from beneath the cannon and spring upon the back of an artillery horse that stood near at hand, and fly from the ghastly battlefield, she would have known that her lover still lived and would probably reach her side unmolested. But this she did not know, and because of her ignorance she wept.

"Courage, child," said Madame Mortier, "I feel sure that Monsieur le Baron will return to you. A little longer, dearie, and it will all be over. The defeat of our armies means that peace will soon reign again. The Emperor's star has set forever."

"Thank God for that," cried Selma. "For if an Emperor must cost so many valuable lives, then let us have a King, so that he be a King of peace."

"There is but one King of peace, my child, and he is our Saviour. So long as man exists, there will be strife and contention, and the sooner we women learn to adapt ourselves to circumstances the better."

While they were speaking there came a sound of tramping soldiers and a rattle of accoutrements in the park. On looking out, an armed force was discovered manœuvring to surround the chateau. Ten minutes later the faithful Antoine announced to his fair young mistress that a Prussian officer was waiting in the *salon* below, and had requested an interview with mademoiselle.

"It has come at last," thought Madame Mortier. "Now we are to be plundered and abused."

"What shall I do, nurse," said Selma, in alarm ; "must I go?"

"It would be better, my love. But let me go with you. I know something of these military men, and may be able to save you annoyance."

"Come then by all means, dear nurse, but let us go at once."

Leading the way, she entered the *salon* where the Prussian officer rose to meet her.

He was a man somewhat advanced in years, as his partially bald head, heavy gray moustache, wrinkled features and shaggy eyebrows indicated. But he possessed a fine physique and a keen eye, and in his gorgeous uniform of a general of division, bore a commanding presence.

"I hope you will not look upon this intrusion too severely, mademoiselle," said he, in very good French, and with a politeness not expected, "but so many things arise out of the fortunes and misfortunes of war, that an officer, in the discharge of his duty, cannot always help being intrusive, therefore I crave your pardon."

"You are very kind to put it in that light," answered Selma, with a feeling of relief, "but will you not be seated?"

The officer, selecting a chair, sat down beside the young girl, who took a seat upon a divan near at hand. Madame

Mortier remained standing near the doorway.

"I wish to assure you, mademoiselle, of my protection," continued the officer. "I am General von Blitzler, and have the honour of commanding the forces at present located in this neighbourhood. You will have nothing to fear from my men. I have placed a detachment of soldiers to guard your premises, and they have strict orders to arrest anyone caught trespassing. Besides, with your permission, I shall make this chateau my headquarters until to-morrow."

Selma was very much relieved at this, and Madame Mortier was not a little surprised. But before anything could be said to express their appreciation and gratitude von Blitzler went on:

"Now, having assured you of safety, mademoiselle," said he, twirling his big moustache, "I am obliged to impose still further upon your hospitality, in behalf of a friend, who is severely wounded."

"Since you have been so kind, monsieur," said Selma, "it would be ungrateful of me to make any objections. A room shall be arranged at once for your friend's reception."

Von Blitzler's countenance assumed an expression of satisfaction, and he settled back in his chair with a smile.

"You are very good, mademoiselle," said he. "Nevertheless it may be something to my friend's interest to state that he is a French Colonel of Chasseurs."

"Ah! then he is your prisoner?"

"Yes."

"But how can he be your friend?"

"He once saved my life at great peril to his own."

"He must be a brave man to risk his life for another."

"He is indeed, mademoiselle, for nothing but bravery could have saved me. It was at Borodino. As you know, the Prussian forces were at that time the

allies of the French. Once during this battle my division was in great danger of being annihilated, and I myself was surrounded by a number of Russians and Cossacks. At the moment of my greatest peril, my friend dashed up with a detachment of chasseurs and rescued me. In the struggle he received a sabre cut across the face. I owe him my life; and since he has fallen into my hands, and is severely wounded, you will understand how anxious I am to make him as comfortable as possible."

Selma was deeply interested, and not a little nervous.

"Since he is a Frenchman, he will be doubly welcome," said she, "but will you not give me his name, monsieur?"

Von Blitzler looked at her keenly. She was pale and trembling, but strove to control herself. For a moment he hesitated, then turning to Madame Mortier, motioned, with a quick jerk of the head, for her to approach.

At this juncture the sound of heavy footsteps and the clanking of sabres in the corridor told that some soldiers had entered the chateau.

"It is Colonel Baron de Banyan, mademoiselle," said he, at last. "It is the division to which he is attached that I have just defeated."

Selma did not faint, but sat as if stunned. Madame Mortier bent over and gently touched her hair. The spell, however, was soon broken; drawing her hand slowly across her brow, Selma rose to her feet.

"Monsieur," said she, calmly; "you are indeed considerate, but will you not favour me still further by having Monsieur le Baron brought to the chateau at once?"

Von Blitzler's expression was one of admiration.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "you are a brave woman. I shall be most happy to

comply with your wishes. Monsieur le Baron is here in the corridor."

Selma looked at von Blitzer as if she had not understood, then suddenly sprang forward toward the door. Von Blitzer intercepted her.

"Pardon me, mademoiselle, said he. "I must remind you that monsieur is severely wounded."

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Selma, in a plaintive tone, then sank back into Madame Mortier's arms, pale and trembling.

The next moment there passed before the door four stalwart hussars, bearing an ambulance stretcher, on which Selma recognized her lover, pale and haggard.

"Maurice!" she cried, with outstretched arms.

He opened his eyes, and the light of a smile stole into his countenance. Then, with Antoine leading the way and the army surgeon following, they ascended the stairway to de Banyan's apartments.

It seemed ages to Selma before she was permitted to even enter the room where the wounded man lay. The Prussian surgeon had given strict orders that de Banyan was not to be disturbed. He had a lance wound through his lungs, and his condition was indeed critical. Still, with careful treatment his chances of recovery were favorable; and at the command of General von Blitzer, the surgeon exercised his skill to the best advantage. As for Selma, after she did gain admittance to the room, she would not leave it, but remained a silent observer, ready for the earliest emergency.

The next day the Prussian army resumed its march towards Paris, and Dr. Blauvelt was left in charge of the wounded master of Chateau Blanc.

Then followed days of anxiety, which told upon Selma in a way that left her

pale and careworn. Finally Dr. Blauvelt announced that the crisis had passed, and his patient was beginning to improve. Then how anxiously did Selma watch and wait for the first evidence of recognition. How she hovered over him, with beating heart and throbbing pulses, praying that she might not be kept longer in suspense. Finally her prayer was answered. One morning as she leaned over him, he opened his eyes, and with a smile murmured her name.

With a thrill of delight she sank upon her knees at his side, and smoothed back the black, waving locks from his brow. It was a happy moment for them both, but as memory returned, dark shadows began to float before de Banyan's mind, and the smile faded.

"What is it, Maurice?" said she, tenderly, noting the change.

He looked at her as if trying to recall something.

"We were defeated, were we not?" said he finally.

"Yes."

"How long since?"

"Ten days, my love, but why trouble about it now?"

"It was our last hope," said he, wearily closing his eyes. A moment later he murmured dejectedly, "and all is lost."

"Save honour," was her quick reply.

"And you," said he, with a smile.

Then for a long time he remained silent, soothed by the touch of her hand upon his brow.

A week later they learned that the Bourbons had returned, and Napoleon had left France forever. It was as if a flock of geese had waddled through the doorway, as an eagle took flight from the dome of the Tuileries.

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